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THE ROAD LEADS ON



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THE ROAD LEADS ON

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BY
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"HUNGER," ETC.

TRANSLATED FROM THE NORWEGIAN BY
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THE ROAD LEADS ON

CHAPTER ONE

THE third generation now guides the destiny of Jensen's great store in Segelfoss. Originally founded by one Per Jensen, dubbed Per paa Bua, it continued under the direction of his son Theodore, also "paa Bua," who traded far and wide, stood forth as a true son of progress and was rain or blue sky to all who crossed his path. Nor was that so very long ago, either; people in town do not have to strain their minds to remember him, for he was contemporary with the old Lieutenant's son, Willatz, who simply went bothering his head about music and came to nought in this world.

Theodore, on the contrary, came to a very great deal. His achievements could be listed at length: village burgo-master, heavy tax-payer, a merchant trading in a grand manner hitherto unknown, once even with a commercial traveler to take in the towns of northern Norway, three men in the store itself, and an office manager to keep his books for him. An active fellow, that Theodore paa Bua, aspiring, waxing ever more prosperous, owner of a fish-sloop and two herring-seines, each with its boat and full equipment, growing more and more kindly with the years, taking a paternal interest in those who were feeling life's pinch, and in time becoming well-liked. In bad years for both sea and soil, many a one was compelled to go to Theodore paa Bua for the bread to keep him alive, and this could not be denied. But, as a matter of course, they would first have to pay him extravagant homage, or, at least, to wag their heads, overwhelmed by all his power and wealth. "A single sack of flour?" he might ask. "How long do you think that will last that family of yours?"

Then, hearing the poor wretch reply that he dared not think of going into him for more, Theodore might turn to one of his clerks and say: "Let him have two sacks!" And, after issuing such an order, it was only right and proper that he should inwardly swell to the bursting point.

He had cast eyes in the direction of Frøken Holmengraa, the mill-owner's daughter, but nothing ever came of that. No, in that particular Theodore paa Bua's vanity had overshot its mark and, since his office manager had been merely a bauble to flash in the fair one's eyes, his first move was to let the poor chap go. There was more to it than that, however: though he continued to maintain his balance and promptly saw the error of his ways, he shortly took advantage of the situation and, one fine day, married the sexton's juvenile daughter who had by no means spurned his courtship. Thus, in spite of his folly in certain directions, Theodore proved that he had a remarkably level head on his shoulders, for he gained a delightful wife, ardent and handsome as a young filly, and if it happened that she was no more than seventeen, she was really sufficiently developed for all that.

How silly the mill-owner's daughter had been! Her father's affairs had been running steadily downhill of late and there she might have struck a bargain, accepted Theodore paa Bua and stepped into a new life of splendour and security. Snobbishness and a devil-may-care pride alone had caused her to stand thus in her own light, and little enough did she gain for that pride of hers, for in the end she found her level as an ordinary housekeeper in Tromsø.

Thus badly had things gone for the once mighty mill-folk, Herr Holmengraa and his daughter Mariane.

But what then of Segelfoss Manor and all its vast estate? The old Lieutenant had been a true nobleman; in his day he had put up a church for the people of Segel-

foss, had donated portraits of the Apostles for the altar and a basin of sterling silver for the baptismal fount and everything else he could think of. He had had no less than seven-and-twenty house servants and his enormous lands under cultivation had extended to the very boundary of the neighbouring parish—a glorious and a princely domain. His wife had been a titled lady from Hanover, Germany and together they had lived in the great white house with its tall pillars, a palace which could be seen from steamers out at sea. Proud and upright he had been, a man of truth and courage. To indicate the worth of a signature, it had been said: “As good as that Willatz Holmsen’s!” His word had held like an oath, the nod of his head had been like a benediction upon his people about him.

But to what avail had all that been? The time came when that sort of thing didn’t go any longer. The Holmsens of Segelfoss were doomed. The fate of the third generation. They persisted in living along like grand folk with not a single penny coming in. And it took no end of money to pay off that house full of servants and to scatter charity throughout the parish, for travel and for the grand receptions such as were held when Carl XV came touring the north or when the prefect and his council stopped with them over the Sessions. And, added to all that, were finally the funds despatched to their son, living the life of a gentleman as a student of music in costly schools abroad. Things were bound to come to a bad end with them. As for the old Lieutenant and his lady, they both died and got out of the way in time, but their son, young Willatz Holmsen—why, he had nothing left to do but to sell out. . . . That had been before Segelfoss had grown into a regular town, before land and houses had been worth an established price, the very development which had given Theodore paa Bua his chance. For no sooner had young Willatz turned everything movable into

cash than Theodore began casting his eyes in the direction of the house with its tall white pillars, that palace, that country seat of kings, and in this his vanity was hugely triumphant. He became sole owner of the glories of Segelfoss Manor.

Yes, those had been hard times, wretchedly hard times up in Nordland. Cheap fish, deep sleep and depression—not a farthing over sixty *skilling* a barrel for prime round-fish. But, for one who had means left over from a former day, it was no trick at all to acquire a palace and land for city lots all up and down the sea. Of course it must not be assumed that Theodore paa Bua was so bloated with wealth that his purchase left no hole in his pocket—as a matter of fact, he found himself sweating no end to meet his payments—but an extension of time was his for less than the asking, so far into the depths had this Holmsen descended. A pity it was how much young Willatz owed both at home and abroad! Yes, and he was obliged to charter a steamer to transport all the handsome furnishings and costly works of art of all kinds from the halls of Segelfoss Manor south to a possible market. A tragic evidence indeed of the power of life and of fate.

And what then were Theodore paa Bua and his wife to do with that palace of theirs? They had a table and chairs for one of the parlours and beds for a bedroom or two. But in this palace there were two grand reception halls downstairs to say nothing of twenty or more guest rooms upstairs, and the plush carpets in some of these rooms were red, and those in others were blue; and the walls of one of the grand salons downstairs were done with a golden floral design, and the walls of the other were hung with pure silk. But nowhere was there to be found a solitary chair to sit upon. After he had become burgomaster, Theodore put one of these salons to good use as a council chamber and went far to impress his fellow townsmen with this meeting-place straight out of wonderland. . . .

A daughter was born to them and the mother was overjoyed. The father had taken the trouble to order some fireworks from Trondhjem but declined to set them off. The following year they had another daughter, a blessed new creation which again brought joy to the mother, though the father, viewing the situation with a practical eye, failed to share her elation. Again no fireworks were set off. But at length, when the father was over forty and the mother was barely half his age, they had a son who pleased them both, a ten-pound baby with much hair on his head and real strength in his grip, a robust little chap. That evening the father got out a certain sky-rocket he had hidden away and tried to touch it off. Nothing happened, however. He struggled with live coals and direct flame, but the thing refused to go off. Oh well, all that meant was that the powder had gone mouldy with the years.

The boy was christened Gordon Tidemand, a name which the mother with all her book-learning—she was the sexton's daughter, bear in mind—had run across some place or other. As a name that was quite all right, there was nothing worth arguing about there, and the lad did not die; on the contrary, he throve, ate and drank like any healthy child, but in time he developed brown eyes. No one was able to understand it—brown eyes! And that was quite all right, too; his blue-eyed parents regarded the situation as an interesting freak of nature and mentioned it quite openly to others: "Will you simply look at what brown eyes he has!" they said. They did nothing to conceal the fact of those sparkling brown little eyes.

But then one day the father was assailed by frightful misgivings.

Had it been back in the days of his hot-blooded youth, Theodore paa Bua would surely have held his wife responsible for those brown eyes. But as things now were with him, taken up every minute of his day with that enormous

business of his and all his other affairs, to say nothing of his repeated exasperation over being the father of all those little girls—an endless procession of girls—he again made the best of the situation and used sound common sense. On one or two occasions he had thumped the table at his wife, and he had gone so far as to squint searchingly into her face each time she called for help from the warehouse to slaughter a calf or smoke some salmon, but further than that he had never gone. Nor had he even for a moment considered dismissing that handsome devil of a Gypsy lad who worked for him down at the warehouse and who was such an able hand with the salmon net.

A practical, superior sort of chap, that Theodore paa Bua, even though he was hardly the man for such an attitude, hardly one of those whose tombstone's are forever cluttered up with fulsome inscriptions. No, he was simply an honest fellow with a slightly twisted sense of ethics. His fireworks had failed to go off; not a single rocket had he been able to despatch with a blazing thrust at the stars. But what of it? In truth, the stars are well beyond the reach of mortal man! And was it, after all, worth while to get rid of the Gypsy and thus only lose a good servant? Who could trap the salmon as cleverly as he? Who would bring in an unexpectedly large profit in fish at the expense of getting his hands all covered with blisters from handling jellyfish, as he? Who would turn out at all hours of the day or night to meet the steamers and ferry ashore all those piles of freight for the store, as he? Furthermore, didn't that Gypsy lad, Otto, come of good people in their own way, too? He belonged to the great family of Alexanders who were from Hungary and who were known all through Nordland, wherever they went with that houseboat of theirs.

Moreover, how could Theodore tell? What proof did he have? None save a pair of shining brown eyes and a certain suspicious way his wife had had about her ever since

that Gypsy had come to Segelfoss. It was something, was it not, that a new light had kindled in her eyes, that she tiptoed up- and downstairs, that she had taken to singing rather frequently of late, and that she was wearing a little gold medallion on a black velvet ribbon about her neck, that little child of nature! Further, if the truth be told, there had once been a desperate embrace involving a kiss and a fumbling of hands one evening out in the smokehouse with Theodore spying on the pair. And last of all, there had been a repetition of the affair one moonlight night right there on the wharf in front of the warehouse door. But these were all, so really what proof did he have! Father Theodore reasoned it out somewhat as follows: In any event, it wasn't a girl this time and even if everything had not been exactly right and proper, the sin was not on his soul.

Time passed and a governess was brought in for the children, a lady—again if the truth be told—with whom Theodore might sport about a bit and to whom he might pay some open attention in order to prove that he, too, was a man of parts and to indicate to his wife that he could play the same game. Of course he could—just see there! He escorted the lady to church without his wife and, when Christmas came, he presented the lady with a sterling silver napkin-ring. Please, now let his wife chew on that a while! He was simply indifferent to what the world might say of his actions; it had not been he, had it, who had brought a brown-eyed child into the world! Well then, folk would certainly be on his side! And quite apart from all that, the masters of Segelfoss Manor had a way of doing about as they liked!

But his young wife followed his example and thereafter it was the Gypsy Otto who took her to church. There they both sat in the traditional manorial pew to defy all public opinion, even though Otto Alexander was only a Gypsy and a common warehouse hand. Hm, Theodore paa Bua

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must have thought to himself at that—the situation is growing intolerable! And the Gypsy was through then and there.

Ay, for autumn was at hand and the salmon fishing was over for that year.

But Theodore was not a bad sort; he was willing to balance accounts. He had a plain talk with his wife and mentioned a new arrangement. The children were growing up rapidly and the little girls, in particular, were old enough now to have a regular tutor, a really learned man. Oh that rascal, Theodore paa Bua! That cunning scamp! He was no Cupid's votary; he was really bored to death with trying to feign an affair with the governess and he was unable to go on simulating a deeply wounded vanity—enough of that sort of thing! No, he was really not so bad.

And it was a splendid solution to the family problem when the governess went her way and a male tutor arrived in the house. Now the children could get some real knowledge into those heads of theirs. Gordon Tidemand, particularly, was in need of manly instruction, brilliant and precocious as he had already proven himself to be, his mind a searching flame. And in time he went to Trondhjem, first to a school where he took first honours, later serving his business apprenticeship as a clerk behind a counter. After that, he spent two years in Germany where he studied "all that pertained to the profession," such as mercantile trading, accountancy, banking and foreign exchange—pompous and superfluous stuff for a mere coastal trader from Segelfoss, but liberalizing and essential for a cultured man of affairs. Theodore paa Bua was doing his level best to ape the ways of the old Lieutenant by giving his son a complete and refined education abroad, and, since he had made no end of money of late on a couple of herring coups, he could well afford this unusual

expense. And not only that: he even assigned his son, that mere youth, the task of buying up some fine old furniture for the halls and parlours of Segelfoss Manor like that which had stood there before—gold-framed mirrors which reached from floor to ceiling, chairs and sofas designed with gilded sphinxes and lion's paws, paintings and vases, tables and inlaid cabinets; and many an odd piece did Gordon Tidemand pick up and send home in enormous packing cases. It was indeed a spectacle to see how the interior of the palace was beginning to blossom again in all its former splendour. A hodge-podge of ornamental pieces, some imitation, some genuine, clocks which naturally did not run, chandeliers with countless broken prisms, bronzes smeared over with cheap patina, certain pieces of authentic furniture in fine old woods, to say nothing of the many beds ornate with angels and whatnot in the guest rooms. The grandeur of the new furnishings went so far beyond all the old stuff young Willatz had carted away that Theodore and his wife hardly knew what to do with it. No, they decided, they would have to leave things standing where they were until their son returned home.

In London Gordon Tidemand met a young compatriot of his, one Romeo Knoff, likewise abroad to acquire a maze of theory. The latter was from a big trading station in Helgeland, the centre of a populous district, a regular port of call for the coasting steamers and stylishly equipped with dovecots, peacock alleys, a tower on the main building, a warehouse and a ship quay of solid concrete. Not always, however, had the elder Knoff been as solid as his ship quay; not until there had been a couple of remunerative bankruptcies had he emerged to carry on his extensive trading in Lofoten fish, his cooperage and boat-building enterprises, along with divers other activi-

ties. A man of energy, a mighty magnate there on his native heath. And the father of two children, a son Romeo and a daughter Juliet—Romeo and Juliet!

After their meeting in London, Romeo Knoff and Gordon Tidemand spent much time in each other's company; they were of an age and they became close friends, studied the same subjects and were thus both products of the same quality-type of culture. They returned home to Norway together and agreed to exchange visits in due time.

Theodore paa Bua was surely no man to oppose the visit of so polished a gentleman as young Knoff; on the contrary, he felt himself distinctly honoured and was much concerned over the coming event. The Knoffs had originally hailed from abroad, but for several generations now had been traders there in Nordland. Theodore, on the other hand, was Norwegian through and through, had descended from Per paa Bua, and was thus, as it were, no more than a last season's product, lacking all glamour save that which was part of the Manor itself as the mark of its former owners—the renowned family of Holmsens. But it was a happy stroke of fortune, at least, which had elevated so local a phenomenon as Theodore paa Bua to his present manorial status.

Romeo arrived with his sister Juliet and, even from the steamer, they gained an immediate impression of grandeur—the Manor, bulky behind its pillared front, the long avenue of arching birches, the belfry astride the storehouse roof. Later, when they arrived on the place itself, and stepped inside that magnificent mansion, the two young Knoffs simply threw up their hands and Frøken Juliet said: "Great Heavens, we live in no such style!" Any wonder then, that Theodore paa Bua swelled with pride!

Upon leaving for home, Romeo and Juliet took both Gordon Tidemand and his two sisters along with them,

and again did father Theodore have occasion to plume himself.

For several years the young people were constantly exchanging visits and their relationship became familiar indeed. The end of it was a double wedding: Romeo made off with Theodore's daughter Lillian and Juliet Knoff came to Segelfoss to live. An even exchange is no robbery. It was only Marna, Theodore's younger daughter, who was left out of it and who remained unmarried for a time.

The town had been quite small to begin with. Segelfoss Manor had been the nucleus, but this lay isolated a fair distance back from the sea. Down by the waterfront stood Theodore's mighty store and about it the rest of the town. One by one, a number of craftsmen had arrived from the south and settled down: a tailor, a photographer, a blacksmith, a baker and a butcher. Several small tradesmen had also settled there, but the latter were finding it difficult to earn a livelihood. The original butcher had been compelled to give up, but another had come to take his place. A watchmaker had turned up in town one day and had found a good bit of work getting all the old clocks up at the Manor to run, but upon completion of that task he had been forced to depart. He had no other choice. . .

But Tobias Holmengraa, the man who had come from Mexico to establish his great mill by the river, he had been responsible for no end of activity and local expansion. During his regime, many outsiders had come to settle in town and the place had grown by leaps and bounds. But Holmengraa's hour of triumph had been, after all, short-lived; Segelfoss and its immediate environs were too small and too impoverished and the distance to cities and towns needing flour too great. Further than that, a flood of hard times engulfed him, he and his workers had a falling-out and all activity perished.

But for all that, the town still advanced step by step;

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a couple of new buildings last year, a building or two this year, the district doctor chose this as his headquarters, and that meant a drugstore, too. After a span of years have elapsed, just see what we have here now: a post-office, a telegraph station, a Grand Hotel, a circuit courthouse, a bank and a cinema. Left over from a bygone day, a church and parsonage, but as the perfect fruit of today, a schoolhouse and a home for the schoolmaster, a lawyer and a sheriff, each with his separate establishment, a police department and a police station, a little printshop and the offices of the *Segelfoss News*. Aside from these, there was little that one could expect. Spreading out through the parish lay hosts of small farms and cottages, and the people lived on the yield from soil and sea.

Little remained of the original village and its people. A few whose history dated back to the regime of the old Lieutenant or the era of the mill still survived, but these were few in number and played no part in the present life of the town. They had hidden themselves away and were living secluded lives; like the ghosts of a vanished age, they were for the most part abroad only after dark, existed as the children of night and were glad to remain unseen. They no longer had sons and daughters over whom to watch and worry, for these had grown up and gone out into the world. Just man and wife remained now, alone, forgotten. Some of the men still went in for a bit of home fishing, others found occupation in cleaning up the town at night, two of the real old men were gravediggers attached to the cemetery.

But once there was a time when these were human beings just like the others who live here, and not so very long ago, either. Theodore paa Bua was alive in those days, but now he is alive no more. One by one they die off and only the real old ones remain. . . . And at the hour of twilight of an evening, the old women come together about the pump to exchange their mighty memories: the mill

was running then with work and good pay for their men, there were clothes to wear and a fire in the stove, coffee steaming in the pot and treacle to pour on their porridge. Now and then God was kind to them and there was a run of herring in the fjord or a good year for cod at Lofoten. And now and then there was a birth or a wedding or a funeral in their neighbourhood and all was so good, so blissful. And now there is that Lassen; he used to be from here and now at last he's got to be bishop and councillor to the King, just like Joseph at the court of Pharaoh in the land of Egypt.

No Grand Hotel, no cinema, no bank here then. Ah yes, but those were the days!

CHAPTER TWO

LIFE at Segelfoss was altered considerably under the new regime. The daily routine was on a somewhat grander scale with far less contact with the village folk. Gordon Tidemand chose to drive back and forth between the store and the Manor in a light phaeton, though the distance was anything but great, and he had put on other grand airs, as well. For instance, what business had he to wear those yellow gloves for so short a drive on a summer day? And he had invested in a smart little motor-boat without having a sign of practical use for it, simply for the purpose of racing out to meet incoming mail steamers; after circling about and calling out a couple of words to the captain, he would head straight in for shore. His point in this was possibly merely to show off for the benefit of the passengers lining the rails. Indeed he was a handsome fellow; there was something of the look of a foreigner about him, with his swarthy skin and dark hair, his aquiline nose, his sparkling brown eyes and his firm narrow mouth. He was always smartly attired, his shoes highly polished. No, here was no *Per paa Bua*, nor a true son of Theodore, either.

During his father's lifetime the seine-boats had fared forth regularly every year, each exploring its own corner of the sea, oftentimes twice a year, in the fall before the Lofoten fishing, and in the spring after the codfishing was over. The buying and selling of fish, Lofoten cod or herring trapped by his seiners, the salting down, the packing, the shipping—these were the interests upon which Theodore's mind had fed and from which he had derived his fortune. But these were not the undertakings

of which Gordon Tidemand had learned in school or off on his travels abroad; his fund of knowledge consisted of accountancy, foreign commerce and international monetary exchange, subjects which were quite irrelevant to the running of his type of business. What good did it do him to set up a refined and complicated system of accounting for his store which could never under any set of circumstances yield him the profits attendant upon a single lucky stroke of his seiners? He insisted upon maintaining a commercial traveler to carry his line through Nordland, though little business seemed to follow in the fellow's wake. One day he summoned this salesman to his private office and pointed to a chair. Big business executive that he was, he was polite but terse in his remarks.

"You haven't been doing much business," he began.

"No, that's the way it looks."

"That last line of ours ought to be going better. Silk nightgowns."

"Yes," said the man, "but folks simply shake their heads when I show them."

"It's a line from one of the finest houses."

"Folks up here still seem to prefer to sleep in flannel. They're old-fashioned, I guess."

"Well, how about those flannel skirts? The latest mode, you know."

"Yes," answered the man with a shake of the head.

"But up here, the women would rather have silk."

"Hm."

"Wool underneath and silk outside," said the man with a laugh.

The big business executive frowned at this sign of amusement. "At any rate, you aren't doing enough business. Something must be the matter. Are you drawing enough for traveling expenses?"

"Yes, I have the same as the rest of us out on the road."

"But," his chief said suddenly, "you yourself might

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possibly equip yourself a little better. Do you call on your trade in clothes like those you are wearing?"

"They are practically brand-new. My last suit possibly got to looking a bit shabby, but this one——"

"Where did you buy it?"

"In Tromsø. At the finest clothing store in Tromsø."

"Perhaps you ought to have polished brass corners on your sample cases," said the chief.

The man stared. "You don't mean it?" he said, aghast.

"I don't know, it was just a thought. But it isn't simply a question of sample cases and clothes, it's a question of general get-up. I'm not sure you grasp my point. Have you ever given a thought to the matter of style and manner? You are the representative of a big house and you should act and appear accordingly. That shirt and that necktie—pardon me for mentioning them!" The chief nodded to indicate that his reference had been sufficient.

But possibly there was some serious flaw in the man's sense of fashion and progress, possibly he was short on the power discrimination. For instance, he did not even realize that at this point the interview had been concluded. He said: "You see, when we're on the road, we often have to carry our bags ourselves. Sometimes we miss ship connections and have to travel by motorboat. We can't always appear spic and span, sometimes we look pretty mussy."

The chief remained silent.

"And sometimes we aren't even as clean as we might be when we arrive in certain places."

The chief remarked in definite conclusion: "All right, but just think over my words. We will really have to inject a little——"

Nevertheless, Gordon Tidemand was not all show and vanity; he had learned, of course, that clothes and a neat appearance are matters of keen significance, but he did not wander off and get lost in the maze of this doctrine.

For instance, he was quick to heed his mother's advice and immediately got busy laying plans to send out a seining expedition.

This mother of his was in many ways worth her weight in gold. She might easily have passed for his sister, so young and good-looking she still was, so joyous, so warm-blooded, so clever. She was said to have taken the bit in her teeth during the early years of her marriage, for she had soon lost all interest in her husband, but that had been a good while ago and was already quite forgotten. She was known as Gammelmoderen,* but that was a stupid nickname, for it had simply been her husband, that Theodore paa Bua, who had grown old before his time and who had allowed life and marriage to use him up. She, herself, was as good as ever today.

"When will you send out the seines, and who have you got to boss the crews?" she asked.

Gordon Tidemand was so clever with writing materials; he had prepared a list of all his father's old seiners and began reading it off aloud.

"You've written it down to the last comma, haven't you?" laughed his mother. "But your father used to carry all that around in his head. And what's that, have you included Nikolai in your list? But he's been dead for some time now, hasn't he?"

"Oh well, we'll simply strike out his name and stick in Altmulig there in his place."

"But Altmulig is too old. No, you must have a young crew out with the seines."

"He's old enough, but he's tough and wiry. I'd trust that fellow with anything."

"But we can't get along without him here on the place."

"We'll manage somehow," concluded her son.

* An affectionate term applied to any older woman who is sweet and helpful by nature. Though literally it means "old mother," the adjective "gammel" has the same affectionate connotation as "old" in "old son," "old man," etc.—Translator.

Gammelmoderen was well acquainted with Altmulig and she knew what a quick head he had on his shoulders. Many was the time she had talked with him and listened to his colourful tales. He was an old sailor, a vagabond, who had turned up one day and asked for work. He was thin and surprisingly nimble; he had wandered about the world no end and could certainly tell tall tales. When asked his port of hail, he had claimed the entire world. But where had he come from last? From Latvia.

The chief, Gordon Tidemand, had grown to like the man in the course of their very first interview there in his office. The stranger had promptly dropped his hat to the floor upon entering the room and had stood there with body erect. Ah, discipline!—to which Gordon Tidemand stood in no way opposed. No, he was not the kind upon whom courtesy is likely to be wasted. More than that, he was helpful by nature and had once found a place in his stockroom for a youth from Finmark for the single reason that the lad could play the fiddle. Yes, but here stood a man with skill of a different order. His name? He had mentioned it, otherwise stating that he had been called “*alt mulig*” (everything possible) from Captain to murderer during his lifetime, so his real name meant nothing, he said. But what was his line of work? Oh, probably it would be best to set him down simply as an *alt-muligmand*, as a general handy man, as thus he could do anything he might be put to, perhaps even a little bit more.

“All right, then, you may stay!” the chief had said with a smile.

Nor had he ever found cause to regret having taken this man into his service. The old fellow had soon proven his worth in many quarters, had, for instance, extinguished a serious chimney fire there on the place with no more than a bucket of common kitchen salt—the devil and all if that hadn’t conquered the flames! He had tinkered

about with the meat-grinder, the wash-wringer and the laundry mangle which were out of repair and had made them as good as new. Without being told, he had scraped and oiled the boats and what tools he could lay his hands on. Then he had reconstructed that filthy old tumble-down pigsty and, with sand and cement, had made it over into a neat, attractive shelter. "Altmulig, come give us a hand!" folk would call out to him whenever a window might happen to stick.

Moreover, he must certainly have been a most deeply religious man, for he would cross himself frequently and the life he lived was one of quiet meditation. No one had ever heard him singing or shouting outlandishly about town, or firing off that revolver of his.

Children were born to the people up at the Manor—two children in three years, and later there were more. Vigour and diligence no end up above, the young mistress tall and slender as a serpent. Then suddenly her figure would begin bulging like that of a leech; ay, how suddenly the change would take place! Mad with youth they were, this couple; they could hardly budge without love, so what could the end of it be but children? Gammelmoderen now had grandchildren to swing on her arm and it began to look as though she would never again be able to call her time her own.

And children were born in the cottages and on the small farms round about; folk married early in life, and in no time were poor, which was exactly what could be expected.

For example, there was Jørn Mathildesen, named thus after his mother, Mathilde, for the reason that he had had no father—well, he married the girl Valborg from Øira. They owned not the tiniest plot of ground and they hadn't a King's copper to live on. For clothes all they had were a few old rags they had picked up here and there. But, even so, they got married and settled down in

a rickety shack.—“For why did you do it and go throwing yourself away?” folk inquired of Valborg.—“Was I to go on waiting for another forever?” she asked in return.—“And you so pretty and all,” folk said. “If you’re twenty you’re never a day.”—“No,” Valborg answered, “but they began with me the year I was confirmed.”

They begged a bit, did Jørn and Valborg, and they must have done a bit of stealing on the side, too, for a sharp eye was kept on them whenever they entered the shops in town.—“Well, what will you have today?” the shopkeepers would ask, jocosely.—“Have I no leave to come in?” Jørn would answer straight back. Whenever they would leave him in peace, it might be that Jørn would inquire the price of a bit of red and green dress material which had happened to catch his fancy, or to ask the cost of a pound of American bacon. But what good did it do to tell him what things were worth? the dealers might grumble. The fact was, he never bought anything, did he? “Have I no leave to ask?” Jørn would answer.

A wretched existence for Jørn and Valborg, but at least they had no children—no, unfortunately, they didn’t have even a child to their name.

But children there were on the farms throughout the countryside, of these alone there were plenty, and they were no mean blessing. Without children there would be no laughter heard one year to the next, and without children no tiny groping hands and no droll questions to answer. Otherwise, poverty and desolation reigned over each rural home. When autumn came, folk might, of course, slaughter a bit of a sheep and, God be praised, there were still potatoes in the house and milk to be had from the byre, so it really wasn’t so bad to be a farmer in a small way, with three or four kine and a horse in the barn and a few smaller creatures besides. But did they *own* these things? They were in debt for more than these and their

entire farms were worth; they were deep in the books of the merchants in town, they were far behind in their taxes, they were living in tumble-down homes. And it would help little were they to offer a cow or a pair of sheep as a payment against those enormous debts of theirs, and whenever the fishing was lean at Lofoten, they only got in deeper. No, they had little enough to offer Jørn and Valborg when these beggars were making their rounds. And another result was, one poor soul would help out another with a half-sack of potatoes or a pail of milk. And thus folk took full pity one upon another and showed such a splendid spirit of mutual helpfulness as must have delighted the angels.

Honest, everyday people, these, content to be what they were. They lived according to the keen good sense of their forefathers, though they lived so close by the town with all its people of rank and quality and the new imported customs. No thank you, the people of the countryside still lived as they had once learned to live and slow they were to adopt such fancy new articles as white collars for the neck of a man and cut tobacco for an honest man's pipe.

Ay, the old ways, those are the best! Look there at those boat-sheds of theirs, those little sheds on stilts! Surely they differ in no particular from those which stood here eight centuries ago when Sverre ruled the land, though they still answer every practical purpose. The walls are open strips of birch and aspen, the roofs are of turf and birchbark. And if someone there is who imagines that these boathouse walls ought to be fitted tight against the weather, the reply is obvious that much would be lost thereby, since it is wind blowing in through the cracks which airs out the sails and the fishing gear left hanging there to dry. And observe those massive wooden locks on the doors of the sheds with their prehistoric wooden keys! No iron there, not a single thing which will rust. And when, at last, lock and key have become rot-

ten, what a simple matter it will be to fit new ones at not a single penny's cost, with the expenditure of only a little time and some deftness of hand—an interesting evening's work for any ordinary man. . . .

These people were industrious in their own way, too, though they were guided by no mad urge. They busied themselves with cutting the winter's fuel supply or with a bit of the usual home fishing, each at its proper season of the year. The children tended the flocks and performed whatever other simple tasks might arise; during the berry season, they would go out into the fields, often in foul weather when the autumn's cold bit deep, often absent the whole day without food. Cranberries and cloudberries, these they would sell in town and bring the money home. Early in life they had learned to amuse themselves with small matters and had suffered no harm in that. Their mothers and sisters looked after house and byre, they spun the wool from the sheep, prepared the loom and wove a glorious thick material for underwear and outer garments, dyed certain balls of yarn and added bright borders and colourful designs to the dresses intended as Sunday best for their little girls and themselves. No living soul was there whom they envied; they could make themselves fine for church—indeed! For there were their Sunday clothes!

Contented farm-folk; poor but contented, they were. For they were accustomed to this way of living and to no other. And there was frequent occasion for merriment in the homes, too. The children, it took so little to make them laugh and squeal, and, often as not, the grown-ups would share in their fun. Evening was the time for games and stories and splendid it was, too, if only to have Karel i Roten drop in, he who was such a master at singing and yodeling, or even old Mons-Karina who chewed tobacco but who steadfastly refused to admit that she did. But it was entertainment flavoured somewhat with eeriness when-

ever Aase the Lapp would stop by. Ay, though she always arrived with a greeting of "Peace!" and departed with "Peace be with you!" she was none the less regarded as a fearsome person.

Folk were so wedded to their superstitious beliefs in trollfolk and goblins and creatures of the underworld. There might be a man who had dreamed something, another who had been given a sign—so many ominous and unfathomable things as there might be in the world! . . . There was, for example, that man named Solmund. One evening he was carting home wood and, according to his story, it was frightfully dark in the forest. As he was making his last trip and was homeward bound, he was walking along behind the load. Suddenly he spied the form of a woman seated atop the load of wood in the cart. He was at a loss to understand how in the world she had got there, but it certainly did not seem right to him and he began straightway praying to God to protect both himself and his horse. Coming within sight of home, the horse suddenly lurched forward into a gallop, and ran away. That female creature up there must have prodded it with something, she herself hopping to the ground and standing there to face him.—"Is that you, Aase?" he asked.

"Ay," she replied.—"Well, what do you want with me?" asked Solmund.—"I want that you shall have me," answered Aase.—"I'll have you out of my way!" he said. "Fee-faw-fum! Clear out, do you hear!"—"You'll have your pay for this!" said Aase. And from that day on the man's horse was shy. Solmund, poor soul, he had stumbled into the grip of fate. . . .

Aase was tall and dark. Her father, it was said, was a Gypsy, her mother a Lapp. She would always appear in Lappish garb—furs sewed together into a kind of smock—and stride straight into the room like a very queen, proud of her comely person, serious and deliberate of speech. She was an unusually handsome woman, but, like

all Lapps, extremely filthy. Some years ago she had probably been a beauty indeed, both in face and in figure. Her face was that of a Lapp and she dressed in Lappish garb, though her outer garment was not embellished with the screamingly bright embroidery and decorative flourishes common to her race—hers was a simple brown smock. From the left side of her belt, from the left side only, there hung a jingling cluster of ceremonial articles: a knife, scissors, sewing implements consisting of a bone needle and a bundle of sinews for thread, a pipe and tobacco, fire-steel and punk, silver gew-gaws and a number of mysterious articles shaped from bone. Aase was forever wandering. God knew when she ever slept! She would simply put in a sudden appearance. She might be in South Parish and in North Parish, both in the same day, though she traveled only afoot. . . .

Here now she suddenly turns up in a cottage. . . .

With the arrival of Aase, the children immediately subside and sneak off into the corners. She has come on no special errand and it is seldom that she asks for anything. Nevertheless the mother of the house makes haste to offer her a few beans of coffee and a bit of tobacco simply as a token of friendly esteem, and it is no less than ordinary politeness which leads the father of the house to inquire whence she has come and whither she is bound. Receiving the appropriate replies, he goes further and asks: "Have you heard as how that Solmund and that horse of his were both drowned in the falls just yesterday as it was?"—"Ay," Aase answers, but it appears as though the matter is not of the slightest concern to her.—"But a danger it was to be driving that horse so near the falls. Didn't that Solmund know as much?"—"You ask me and I ask you!" Aase answers.—"And then as to that poor Tobias as was burned from house and home this very week as it was? Have you heard anything more about the fire, you who go about

meeting so many folk?"—"No," Aase answers. . . . With dreamy eyes she sits there thinking thoughts of her own; now and then she glances up and her brown eyes are eery and fathomless. What is on her mind? Nothing at all, perhaps. Or perhaps it is only that her heart is heavy, perhaps she is suffering for love. She is unmarried and lives in a hut together with an old, old Lapp, so old that it is impossible that he should be her lover. Well, but it must be, then, that Aase is a girl who is doomed to be barren—barren at something past thirty, though still a handsome creature. There is something so strange about Aase; though in a drawling way all her own, she speaks good peasant Norwegian, and true it is that she knows more than other Lapps; she is not without her gifts. She reads but little and she writes not at all. Happening in at some dance and being offered something to drink, she always calls for whiskey and seems able to stand no end of it. . . .

At length she rises to her feet. "Well, so now I'm on my way again," she says.

"Ho, what's your need for hurry? You've time and plenty," the father of the house says to be polite.

"I'm on my way to North Parish. There's a child badly scalded I'm to see."

At which Mother uncomfortably exclaims: "Oh, then hurry you must! Ay, hurry you must!"

"I arrive at my hour exactly!" says Aase, nodding. "Peace be with you!"

Mother follows her outside with something hidden beneath her apron to give her. When she returns, Father eyes her apprehensively and asks: "Did she spit?"

"No."

The whole house heaves a sigh of relief, the children emerge from their corners and promptly begin teasing each other and giving imitations.—"My, but your face was

white!" says Big Brother to that tiny wee sister of his.— "It was?" she squeals. "Why, I could have walked right up and touched her!"

But oh no! Aase had appeared as slightly more awesome than that! Baby Sister had had no more the courage to go up and touch her than, for instance, her parents had had. . . .

Whether deserving of it or not, Aase enjoyed the reputation of being able to rid folk of their ailments; she was said to have effected a number of remarkable cures in the case of both people and animals and it was believed that she could bring misfortune upon a household by merely spitting on the doorstep. And she gave herself magic airs. "I arrive at my hour exactly!" she had said. She was sent for by folk who had faith in her powers, and no one there was who dared utter a word against her, as that would be the surest way of inviting her revenge.

"Sh! Still now!" says Mother. "Quiet your mouths about that Aase! Outside she can stand and hear right through the wall!"

"I say only that Baby Sister was afraid," the lad mumbles.

The other children enter the argument at this point, promptly taking sides with the youngest. "It was Big Brother himself who really was afraid!"

Then they all laugh mischievously and Big Brother is made to feel small. . . . They cuddled up together, became enemies, then friends again. . . .

What a blessing it was to have children! What would a home be without children? A hollow tree-trunk, no more. Afford to have them? Somehow they'd manage to afford them, the parents would decide. And if it were a question of their growing so fast that it would be impossible to keep them in clothes, well—they would be cold in winter anyway, so what if they were likewise a bit chilly in summer? And if the house itself lacked certain comforts, the

main point was these children had never been spoiled. During the rains of spring and autumn every turf roof leaked a bit and it would be necessary to set pots to catch the drops. And it was always worst up in the loft where the children slept—there they would lie with cups and pans on all sides of them on the bed. But were they disheartened or petulant when they happened to upset one of these pans and soaked the bed with rain water? No, they would set up a momentary commotion, with laughter or howls of anger which soon subsided. They accepted things as they were, promptly went back to sleep, and in the morning had forgotten that anything at all had occurred. They were accustomed to turf roofs which leaked; they were accustomed to no other kind.

Every Saturday the floors would be scoured till they shone. And then of a sudden it would appear to Mother and Father that the floors were strewn with twigs of juniper, as was the custom in the north, though neither of them had placed them there. They would hardly be able to believe their own eyes. Well? Oh, it had been those thoughtful little girls, God bless their tiny hands! Now it was out why they had sneaked off into the forest in spite of the difficult going. Of course, for they had gone to fetch fresh juniper to strew on the floors for the Sabbath. How clean and pure was the fragrance of juniper there in the warmth of the house! And on each berry there was the mark of a tiny cross. Now what could have been on God's mind when He gave this symbol to the juniper? There was something quite rare about juniper, it was something more than a mere strew for the floor; if it were desired to sweeten up the house, one would light a twig of juniper and swing the smoke through the air. And when Mother was at the milk pans she would boil a sprig of juniper in each, to make them sweet and clean.

CHAPTER THREE

WHEN the seiners returned empty-handed, the chief's only words were: "Better luck next time!" He was not one to hang his head, he could take things like a man.

They settled accounts in his private office, one crew at a time, each headed by its own boss. In the days of Theodore paa Bua, it had been the custom for the seine-boss to render a colourful report of his expedition. Theodore would sit there on his high swivel-stool, completely absorbed, nodding or shaking his head from time to time, and firing back many a question.

Not so now.

"No, we didn't make out so well this time," says the seine-boss.

The chief offers nothing in reply, merely continues his calculations.

"But I don't see as how we could do more than what we did."

The chief continues to figure.

The seine-boss essays further conversation: "Or what do you think yourself?"

The chief lays aside his pen and replies: "What do I think myself? We were unlucky. That's all there is to be said about it. Better luck next time!"

And thus it went with the second seine-boss and his crew—not a superfluous word from the chief. No, he was quite unlike his father who had sat there before him and chatted away with his seiners. Grand to the point of appearing somewhat ludicrous Theodore paa Bua had been, but a thorough man of the people, and downright kind and

helpful when flattered into it. Here today sits his son on the same swivel-stool and is no more than civil and matter-of-fact, his an air which holds him aloof from his people.

Well, after all, what was there to be said about those luckless expeditions? What was there about them to warrant an elaborate verbal exchange? He had laid out provisions and a few weeks' pay for two crews, but that was nothing to upset him. On the contrary, folk might well say of him: "See, there is a man who is able to stand the loss!" Besides, how could he expect good fortune from the very start? No seine in existence is a pot of gold each year. And what difference did it make if the *Segelfoss News* did publish a notice calling attention to the fact that both crews had returned home empty-handed? . . .

Gordon spoke to his mother. "What do you say to a little party?" he asked.

"What kind?"

"A few people in town, a bit of wine and something to eat?"

"I think you're mad!" laughed his mother. "You've made no fortune in herring, have you?"

"That's just the point," her son replied.

Oh that Gordon! His style of thought seemed so alien to his mother, so incomprehensible to the widow of Theodore paa Bua, so utterly outlandish! She herself would have done everything in her power to compensate her loss, would have scrimped and saved every penny she could in order to come out even in the end. But to such old-fashioned ideas her son simply shook his head.

"Come, let's go have a talk with Juliet about it!" he said.

The dinner party proved something of a fizzle.

Gordon Tidemand and his wife had held no grand receptions in their home in the past. After christenings, they had merely entertained the godparents and the pas-

tor and his wife at dinner. This time, however, invitations had been scattered far and wide and many were the guests who arrived at the house. But of good cheer there was a conspicuous lack. What could the matter be? Though the gentlemen were not in evening dress, the ladies had attired themselves in their choicest finery. Moreover, the beautiful Fru Lund was there. She, the doctor's wife, was in the habit of never going anywhere but on this occasion she had made an exception. And there was enough to eat and the bottles were full of good wine and the maids wore starched white aprons as they went about serving the guests, but these seemed not enough. Dinner was served in the room of golden flowers, champagne appeared on the table, the host made a speech, the district judge made a speech, but there seemed no joy or gusto in anything. Oddly enough, Gordon Tidemand was himself in no way stiff or formal; he played his part admirably and his wife, Juliet, was the perfect hostess. Nor did the pastor put a damper on the spirits of the party; to the contrary, he was the most jovial person present. Was it Herr Holm, the druggist, then, who charmingly or otherwise, was forever cutting up and again was quite himself?

He had been in high spirits upon arriving at the party. Not only had he found something tasty in his own cellar before starting out, he had also stopped in at the hotel on his way. Holm was a bachelor, as was his fellow-Bergenser, the hotel proprietor, and the pair were seen often together.

But what difference should it have made so far as the present dinner party was concerned if Druggist Holm had been in high feather when he arrived? He was no bourgeois. He had been placed next to Gammelmoderen at table and that possibly had been a mistake, for they appeared to be waxing more and more confidential as the dinner progressed.

The pastor made no great shakes about his reverence;

he was human just like the rest and frightfully poor in the bargain; his shoes were in wretched condition, his clothes all frayed and mended, but his cheeks were plump and he had a charming head of grey hair. He knew how to take a joke and was the recipient of more than one sly dig. His jovial round face would break into a thousand wrinkles when he laughed and this had inspired Lawyer Pettersen to utter the one *bon mot* of his life when he called the pastor "Lohengrin."

"Pettersen clever?" asked the druggist when he heard of the attempted pun. "In the first place it isn't clever, but if it is, then he must have read it some place!"

Lawyer Pettersen's head was too small for his gangling body and when the pastor heard his own new nick-name he merely remarked: "Why—that buttonhead!" Nor was this attempted repartee exactly a flash of scintillant wit, but as an appellation it was apt and it stuck to its man.

To be sure, Pastor Ole Landsen was anything but an inspiring preacher and his sermons were ill-attended more often than not. People seemed to prefer the prayer-meetings held in the cottages round about by various itinerant evangelists, but this fact never once aroused the local pastor to ire. "People are rather silly, I believe," was all he ever said. "It's cosier to sit right in church now that we've got us a stove."

His wife was a charming little woman, still pretty, still girlish, ready to blush on the slightest provocation. Her face and her personality were strongly dove-like. She was quiet and retiring in manner, but she had a pair of bright little eyes which never missed a thing.

"Sit still, Druggist!" says Gammelmoderen to her dinner partner.

"All right, then still it shall be!"

"Haha, for otherwise I shall have to change my place."

"If you do, I shall change mine, too!"

The pastor's wife blushes.

The district judge tells of the inquiry he has held in regard to Tobias' fire. "It was like pulling teeth to get anything definite out of them," he says. "They simply sat there scared out of their wits lest they say too much. What they did say was so much foolishness. Here is an example of my questions and the answers I received—it is the daughter I am now examining in an effort to determine the condition in which she found her father when she discovered the fire.

"I am as friendly as can be when I put the following question: 'How did you find your father when you came to tell him of the fire?'

" 'He was asleep,' she replies.

" 'In the bedroom?'

" 'Yes.'

" 'Was he undressed? Hadn't he just been out for a walk?'

" 'No.'

" 'How did you know your father was asleep?'

" 'He was gasping.'

" 'By that do you mean he was snoring?'

"At this she grows red and is certain I am trying to trip her up. Therefore she holds fast to her statement that her father was gasping—and furthermore that he was asleep. I was obliged to drop it right there. The fact is, they had agreed upon what they were to say, but when it came time for them to utter their explanations they got all tangled up. Now the father must have been lying there awake as he had just come in from a walk, but that is not the same thing as to say that he had himself set fire to the house. She was a pretty little girl, too; she had such a pleading way about her. I confess, I felt sorry for her."

"Her sister is in service with me," says the druggist. "And what a regular little steam engine she is! She has us all right by the ears."

General laughter. "Where did you get hold of her?" some one asks.

"Hm?—oh, she was working over at the hotel and had learned a bit of cooking there. I got her from the proprietor. She's a wonder, though, the witch!"

Gammelmoderen: "Poor Druggist. Did he have his ears pulled all out of shape!"

"That's right. And she's a free-thinker, too!"

"Free-thinker?"

"She laughs at people who go to prayer-meetings. She refuses to have anything at all to do with them."

"My, what you must go through!" smiles Gammelmoderen, her cheeks sweetly flushed with the wine she has drunk.

And at this point the druggist must have inadvertently come in some sort of contact with her under the table, for she suddenly starts up, then settles back in her chair with a sigh of: "Ah!"

The judge continues: "Many times it is a sad duty to be obliged to examine poor people. It is cowardly, I know, but as a rule I allow my clerk to do it. He can conduct an investigation with less trouble to his finer nature—he is from Trondhjem."

Lawyer Pettersen adjusts his spectacles and smilingly assures the party that during his term as magistrate's clerk he, too, had many times found it difficult to do his duty when this consisted of taking over the duties of the magistrate, even though he himself was also from Trondhjem.

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed the druggist without a sign of self-restraint.

All at the table smiled, and even the lawyer himself smiled good-naturedly.

"I suspect it is more or less embarrassing for all of us to go snooping into other people's affairs," says the pastor, "but that is no reason why we should turn aside from our duty."

The lawyer: "Yes, there really is something to be said about you clergymen. When I think of the harangues you

are in the habit of delivering over a grave—why wouldn't it be in better taste simply to come out with a bit of straightforward talk?"

The pastor: "Addressed to the dead?"

"I mean instead of singing the praises of the dead, of literally bragging about the dead."

"Hm-hm," says the pastor. "Yes, of course it is possible that we do tend to make too much of it. But, don't you see, since the dead can no longer hear us, it is our task to console as best we may those left behind. What sense would there be in calling a corpse to time? Let the dead man answer for himself in the place where he has gone! To attempt to reckon accounts with him on earth would be an insult to Almighty God."

The lawyer: "Console those left behind? Even when they are inwardly rejoicing over this very death? I am referring in particular to the disgusting tommyrot shouted over the coffins of dead officials. That's one thing you clergymen ought to cut out."

The pastor, in a quiet voice: "There is certainly something in what you say. But with a little experience in such matters, I doubt you would find them so obscure. A man and wife may have lived together like cat and dog, but the moment one of them dies, the other immediately comes to me with a bosom filled with praise and blessings for the departed and begs me to say something fine."

"Ugh, are we really like that!" exclaims the magistrate's wife. "I mean, we human beings. I mean, are we as loathsome as that?"

The pastor: "There is really nothing loathsome about that, my good lady. It is of some significance to the children, in any event, that nice things are said at the graves of their parents. Put yourself in the place of the children, if the very opposite were to take place."

"I would sign a release for all that!" put in the magistrate.

"But you have no children, have you?" the druggist shot back.

"No! No!" exclaimed several of the ladies in unison. "The pastor is right!"

Fru Juliet, with a wry smile: "Just think, Gordon, that's the way it will be with us: a splendid eulogy simply for the sake of our children, regardless of whether or not we deserve the kind things that are said of us!"

"Right, Juliet! Skoal!"

The doctor's wife addresses her husband across the table: "Where do you suppose those boys of ours are now?"

The doctor: "Oh you and those boys of ours!"

"Yes, I am a bit uneasy," she smiles helplessly. And her face is so pretty and her teeth so white.

"They are probably down at the sloop again climbing about in the rigging," he teases.

"Boys usually know pretty well how to look out for themselves," says the magistrate.

The doctor agrees at once: "Yes, isn't it true? But my wife is unable to let them out of her sight."

Gammelmoderen is seen to leave the table, her hand fumbling a bit with the arm of her chair. No one seems to notice her, but the pastor's wife blushes red as fire.

Fru Juliet turns to the doctor's wife and attempts to reassure her: "All you have to do is telephone home and inquire about the boys."

Coffee and liqueurs were served in the large reception hall, but the affair seemed no more festive than it had before. Gordon Tidemand was disappointed: the devil with trying to provide elaborate dinner-parties for unappreciative people! There each one sat, uttered his few miserable words and then fell silent. No one seemed impressed. He would never invite them again.

With the arrival of the whiskey there were slight signs of life; conversation was resumed, the men rose partially

to the occasion, but not a word was uttered concerning the most important of details: this feast at the old palace, this reception in the grand manner, the antique silver, the entertainment itself. Even the doctor who himself had come of a grand home and ought therefore to have understood a thing or two, even he behaved as though the affair were not much of anything.

What did not occur to Gordon Tidemand was that his party was in truth little else, neither one thing nor another, simply a hodge-podge of this and that, from the excellent food and the large variety of wine to the pompous but tasteless interior furnishings. The present occupants of the Manor were simply squatters, the golden flowers on the wall had danced for a finer breed. Gordon Tidemand did not swagger like a peasant, he made no obnoxious parade, but all that he knew he had acquired from his betters, including his modesty. Fru Juliet had been born something more of an aristocrat and whatever she might have lacked in this regard was immediately compensated by her own great natural charm. Now what about Doctor Lund? He was the district doctor, a government official, thus, and not one of your aggressive little medicos setting up practice in a city and doing his best to ruin business for his older colleagues. If it were true that he had originally come of an important family, all that was but a vague memory in his mind by now, and the steady grind of making sick calls had proven anything but a refining influence. He had acquired his wife in a little place up north called Polden. She was of the common people and her name was Esther. She knew nothing of the finer things of life but she was well-equipped with the primitive wisdom of her class, was furthermore a thing of beauty from top to toe, exquisite to look at, though she was already the mother of two husky youngsters. When she rose to leave for the telephone, there was no one in the room whose eyes had failed to follow her.

The postmaster's wife, Fru Hagen began to play upon the quaint little clavicord which Gordon had picked up abroad and shipped home along with his odd assortment of other antiques. It was his custom to apologize for this instrument, though he had always been careful to add: "But Mozart knew nothing better." The postmaster's lady was a small light-haired creature, thin, somewhat pug-nosed, probably in her late twenties. She was near-sighted and she would throw back her head and cross her eyes whenever she attempted to look someone in the face. She played a few lovely things and, when asked, added an encore or two, concluding with a dainty minuet.

Gordon Tidemand: "You seem to be able to get more music out of that contraption than was ever put into it."

"This contraption is good enough for me," she replied as she rose. "And see how lovely it is! Just look at the harp, see the beautiful inlay work!"

"Did I hear that you have studied in Berlin?"

"Yes, for a short time."

"For a long time," corrects her husband, the postmaster.

"But I really accomplished very little."

"Oh yes, you did!" affirmed the druggist from where he was sitting.

"Fru Hagen has pupils here. She gives lessons," explains Fru Juliet.

"Just a few pupils," admits Fru Hagen, forever putting herself down.

The postmaster declares: "She took singing at first, but then she lost her voice."

"Oh! And did she never get it back?"

"No. It was during a fire. She was rescued through a window and caught cold."

"Possibly I never had much voice to lose," she says with a smile. With that she turns to the druggist and asks: "Haven't you your guitar with you?"

"Don't you dare try and bring me out when you're around!" he replies.

"But I've heard you before."

"Yes. Under excusable circumstances."

"Hm!" the lawyer puts in tartly.

"Keep still, Lawyer!"

"Hahaha! I've never been refused a word in a case before!"

"No—really?"

"Well, I believe I won the case to which you are referring, didn't I?"

Holm: "Winning cases! So the laws of Norway permit even lawyers to earn their bread!"

The magistrate sits chuckling good-naturedly at this duel of words between two opponents forever on each other's necks. Then, as the doctor's wife has just returned to the room, he turns to her and asks: "Well, Fru Lund, and were the boys aloft on the sloop?"

"They are out fishing."

"Yes, those boys never fail to find some new means of risking their lives!" the doctor remarks to tease his wife.

"We are in mortal danger wherever we are," cites the lawyer's wife who is religious.

"Yes, but my husband never seems to think anything is dangerous where my boys are concerned," remarks Fru Lund.

The doctor wags his head: "There, you see? *I* never count for anything any more—it's only her boys these days!"

"Hahaha!"

"Moreover," says the doctor, "cold feet with her are at once synonymous with fever and headache. In any event death seems imminent."

"Ugh!" someone groans. "Death!"

"Yes, that's one thing not one of us can escape," remarks Lawyer Pettersen with the air of a sage. "And it's so natural, too."

The doctor: "So natural, did you say? I know an old man of ninety who is about to die. But that's the one thing he's dead set against doing. His appearance is truly frightful, but he simply will not give up. Medicine, fomentations, food! He is so hideous, so emaciated and so downright filthy that one dreads so much as to touch him, but there he lies, for all eyes to gaze upon. An animal creeps off by itself to die."

The pastor: "Yes, but a human being, Doctor!"

"Well, what is there delicate or refined about a human being, now that you seek the comparison? We have reason enough ourselves to hide. In appearance the human being is enough to make one groan—longish, fattish, unaesthetic bodies, patches of hair here and there, protruding knuckles and flabby flesh, a basketful of odd materials thrown carelessly together to form the most grotesque figure on the face of the globe. Anything beautiful about that, seen objectively?"

"Yes, *Fru Lund* is beautiful!" Druggist Holm blurts out in a high-pitched voice.

A moment's stillness, then laughter from all corners of the room. Oh that druggist, that druggist! But *Fru Lund* was at a loss and the pastor's wife sat there blushing.

The doctor continues his discourse: "Now turn and look at a bird, take just a common everyday wood-grouse. What a lovely creature she is, what graceful lines and curves, the colour of every known metal in her feathers. Or look upon any flower you choose. A miracle from root to blossom. But a human being?"

"This is only one of those things you have gone speculating about in order to cultivate a knowing attitude," the pastor gaily remarks.

The lawyer ventures a further learned comment: "But it is man who has been created in God's image!"

The doctor, somewhat more meekly: "It may be that I was a bit too harsh in my judgment. But I have gained an impression or two from having visited the sick and sat

by many a death-bed, impressions which might cause you to hold your nose. Would you like to hear an example?—Once I was called upon to shave a certain corpse. It was a friend of mine who had died, so I decided against calling in outside help. He had been in life a person of so-called refinement. In any event, there was nothing grand about him as he lay there stretched out in death. Well, I lathered his face and started in. He had worn his face clean-shaven, so I had quite some work ahead of me. It went fine while I was shaving his cheeks, but when I came to his upper lip, it seemed that my razor must have pulled, for he groaned. I do not exaggerate—the razor pulled a bit and he groaned. The sound probably came from the skin stretched taut beneath the razor slipping back into place. Well, I got past the upper lip at length, but the worst part still lay before me, the throat, the Adam's apple. This involved an awkward unnatural position for one who was not used to shaving another—it was necessary for me to bend far forward with the upper part of my body, whilst manipulating the razor. Well, I must have inadvertently placed my left hand upon the chest of the corpse and leaned my weight upon it for an instant. But that was enough. The chest sank beneath my weight and the corpse exhaled a long breath—Good Lord in Heaven, I received that sudden puff of rank air full in the face! It was not my habit to faint, but, believe me, I immediately sank down into a chair behind me. The air from those dead lungs had been killing, an unearthly stink impossible for anyone to imagine!”

The gentlemen were outwardly calm, but they were finding it difficult to restrain their laughter. “So you weren’t able to finish shaving the corpse?” one of them asked.

“Oh yes, I came to, a little later in the afternoon.”

The pastor: “But what were you trying to—? I don’t believe I quite understand—”

"That was your human being!" said the doctor.

The pastor thought this over. "No, it was not," he said at length. "That was the remains of a human being, the cadaver."

The chief telegraphist was obliged to go on duty and departed. He had done nothing to shine at the party, had merely sat comfortably smoking. He was a bibliophile and as there was not a single book to be seen in the room, he had had nothing to talk about. His wife remained at the party.

The glasses were changed and tokay was then served. Tokay! Could not even this raise the party from the level of the commonplace? It was, to be sure, a rare old wine from abroad, but no one seemed to take any particular notice of it.

"Skoal, Fru Hagen!" toasted Gordon Tidemand. "I believe you will recognize this wine?"

"I once tasted it in Vienna," replied the postmaster's wife.

"Of course. In Austria and Hungary it is tokay one drinks after dinner—in England it is port."

"Well, in Norway it is whisky and soda," observed the druggist, swallowing his wine in one gulp.

Laughter—"Yes, in Norway one drinks whiskeys and soda! Many of them."

"But in France—what would it be in France?"

"Champagne. One continues with champagne."

"I've never tasted this particular wine before," says the pastor and spells through what is written on the label: "*Tokay-Zsdaly*.' Splendid, isn't it?" he adds and smacks his lips.

But as the tokay remained practically untouched in the glasses, Fru Juliet rang for champagne and assorted fruits: apples, grapes and figs! Why, heavens and earth! everyone must certainly have thought to themselves, and the host was able at last to recognize a faint glimmer of

the emotion he had striven to arouse in his guests. But the sensation soon passed over, and the party settled back into its deadly mood. What a boring affair! thought Gordon Tidemand bitterly. I'll never invite them again! Never!

The magistrate glanced at the clock as a suggestion that it might possibly be time to break up, but he immediately decided he could equal his host and hostess in powers of endurance and remained seated where he was. Fru Juliet had the children brought in and showed them off to the group—by way of interlude, that too. Exclamations and the usual amazement, honeyed words, cootchy-cootchy—but there was so much cigar smoke there in the room, the little ones soon began to cough. It was Gammelmoderen who had brought in the children and it was she who led them away. She seemed as good as ever, all fresh and smiling.

"It's a pity you have no children, Lawyer," says the druggist.

"Children? How could I ever support them?"

"Poor chap!"

The magistrate now looks at the clock in earnest and rises. Fru Juliet meets him half-way. "What's the hurry?" she asks, persuasively. "It is so pleasant to have you here."

"Ah yes, my good lady, but the time has really come."

All rise, extend their hands, give thanks, and thanks. The druggist was himself to the end. "Strange people to be leaving a treat like this. Now just look at that bottle of champagne, Lawyer! There it stands perishing in its bath of ice with no one to come to its rescue!"

Gordon Tidemand could no longer restrain himself. "No, let's not try to hold them, Juliet. It is we who are to offer thanks to them for having had the kindness to come and look in on us!"

There was nothing to be said to this. Genuflection seemed really in order!

Later he remarked to his wife: "That was a rotten idea of mine. Did you ever in your life see such people! You can bet, I'll never repeat this affair!"

Fru Juliet: "Sh, Gordon!"

"Oh, you're always so ready to excuse!"

"They'll remember, you'll see," she said.

"Do you think so? But they acted as though they had known of such things before."

"They couldn't very well say anything while they were here."

"They didn't have to say anything. But damned if they oughtn't to have demonstrated an occasional sign of enthusiasm. Over the tokay, at least?"

Fru Juliet voiced her opinion that it had really been a splendid party, the guests both pleased and pleasing. The druggist had been in high feather and witty indeed, the postmaster's wife was captivating.

"Yes, she too has been out in the world," said Gordon Tidemand. "But the others? No, we shall never have them again. Eh, Juliet? Not by a damned sight!"

CHAPTER FOUR

THEN came the autumn, then came the winter. And the winter was a dismal time, snow and cold, short days, darkness. The small farms and the lonely cottages had deep pathways through the snow to each other, and now and then a human form might be seen there, walking. It might be of an evening with moon and stars, and it might be the woman from Roten walking over to the neighbouring farm in order to borrow a skirt.

Ay well, and all the menfolk were off in Lofoten and Karel was off in Lofoten and it fell to the lot of that woman of his to keep things going, what with the children and the cowbarn, until some three weeks after Easter when the menfolk would be returning home. It was a hard time for her, she had good use for all her patience and all her frugal ways.

She had once been the girl Georgina, Gina to most, as poor then as now and not much for the eyes of a man, but young and healthy and able at work and she had sung so wondrously with her strong alto voice. Now she was Gina i Roten. She had not come from any high place and she had married into no worse state of poverty than some others, only that she was older now and many times a mother, and forty years. But was that anything! She was used to it and she was used to nothing else. Things might have been worse with her, of course they might; her years went by, one by one, and she had her children and her man and they had their little farm and their cattle in the shed, though 'tis true they owned but little clear. And if her man was a wizard at singing a ditty—ay, and famous for

the words he had once set to a waltz—she was something in her own way, too. There was no one like Gina to stand upon the knoll and call home her creatures from the pasture of an evening. “Soo-a! Soo-a!” A melody which sang through the air, though ’twas nought but a cry, a call for the cows to come home, like a prayer in a voice of rich velvet. And in church she would sing out like no one else, and those at her side would fall silent. Her voice she had received from a God who could afford to squander his gifts.

She goes walking along the deep footpath through the snow; ay, and the path is like a deep ditch and she becomes white with snow to her knees. All is not well with her now, she is clean out of feed for her creatures and she must find a remedy. Tomorrow, along with another woman who is also in need of feed, she must search through the parish for hay.

“Good evening!” she greets in the neighbouring cottage.

“Good evening! Oh, is that you, Gina? Sit down.”

“No, sit I really mustn’t,” says Gina and seats herself. “Just passing by I was.”

“What hear you for news?”

“No, what can I hear for news when I’m never outside that door of mine?”

“Ay, we each have our things to do,” says the woman. “We must only thank God for the health that we have.”

Silence.

“Ay,” says Gina, with a bit of trouble on her mind. “I saw as you had a web up last fall?”

“Ay, and that’s no lie.”

“And so much for a web it was, too, I could see. There was yellow and blue and everything else you can mention. If a dress it was for, it was lovely indeed and all that.”

“Both for a dress and a skirt,” the woman replies. “I was beginning to go so naked for clothes.”

"Ay, and a shame it is to be asking. But it might be as you'd give me the loan of the skirt for tomorrow?"

The woman gives a momentary start, then says: "Ho, is it feed then you're short of?"

"Ay, as it is!" replies Gina, with a violent nod of her head.

No, the woman needed no lengthy reflection to tell her why Gina wished to borrow the skirt. It was no riddle to her. For she too was running short of provender out in the shed. And it was far from likely that Gina wished to dress up and appear fine in the new skirt: she wished to carry home hay in it. It was an ancient tradition that one should carry home hay in a skirt; oh, it was something of an annual event there in the parish—the peasant skirt would hold so much, it was like a balloon when filled. Almost at any time a pair of womenfolk might be seen shuffling along through the snow with tremendous burdens on their backs—skirts tight full of hay and tied up with a rope. These wanderers were part of the winter landscape; there was always someone short of feed and always another who was a bit better off for hay and who was willing to sell a truss or two. The women seldom had a penny to their names before the return of their men from Lofoten, but a new and colourful skirt would be sure to gain them the necessary credit for a bit of hay; more, it would give the neighbours to understand that the need was not the result of mere poverty but of the enormous number of creatures for which one could never provide enough, and which represented a small fortune in themselves.

"But a pity it is to be asking you," repeats Gina.

"No, that it's not," replies the woman, proud to be the owner of a skirt fit to loan. "Who's to be with you tomorrow?"

Gina mentioned a name.

"Where has she borrowed her skirt?"

Gina mentioned another name.

"Ho!" says the woman. "Then I don't imagine as you'll be ashamed to be showing my skirt!"

"No, that I should never be!"

"Here it is. Double thick and summer wool every inch of the thread. Let me hear what you think of the border?"

"A miracle for work," says Gina. "I've no words in my mouth to praise it!"

Gina returns home with the pride and pleasure in her of being able to swagger a bit on the morrow with such a splendid skirt. But on the way home she meets Aase, that witch woman, that cross between Gypsy and Lapp, that wandering plague of a woman.

"Bless the meeting!" says Gina, sweet as butter and stepping far out into the snow to make room for Aase. "Have you come from my place? And none but the children at home there!"

"I didn't come to see you," Aase answers. "I only looked inside."

"Such a pity it was and all that! Had I been home, I should surely have given you a bit of this or that."

"There's nothing I'm needing!" Aase mumbles. So saying, she passes on.

Gina hastens home. She knows that her children are hiding scared out of their wits in the corner, that they are daring not so much as to move. Gina has received a bit of a scare herself—she is no greater than she is—but she must appear plucky for the sake of the children.

Entering the house she says at once: "What's this I see, you're afraid? Why, what a thing to be! That Aase? My, my! What then if it was? I just met her myself and all I heard was a bit of a kind word. Aren't you ashamed to cry like that? Here it's moonlight and all that! And all you have to do is pray to the Father in Heaven. What was I going to say—did she leave straight off?"

The children reply both yea and nay; they don't know,

they can't remember, they hadn't dared so much as to breathe—

"Ay, but she didn't spit then when she left?"

The children give various answers, they really aren't quite sure, they didn't look—

The mother weighs the matter in her mind a moment: wouldn't it be possible for her to run out and overtake Aase, slip something into her hand? Oh yes, she too is somewhat wrought up in her mind. But she doesn't dare reveal it. Then Lillemor speaks up, Lillemor who is too tiny to be afraid; she asks mama what she is carrying under her arm.

This relieves all minds. "Ay," says mama. "You simply should see what I have. All come here now to the light! This is the pretty skirt mama is to fill up with hay to bring it home tomorrow. Did you ever see anything so pretty! . . ."

Three weeks after Easter the cod ran out in East Lofoten and the menfolk returned home. An average year, the fishing light all the way through, but fine prices—a bit of change in their pockets again, wife and children saved once more. And the sun shone brightly and the snow turned brown and brooklets began to form which froze over every night only to become brooklets again with the morning's sun.

The traveler is ready to depart for Nordland and Finmark with the spring line—silks and woollens, a bit of velvet, a bit of cotton, fashionable frocks, patent leather shoes. The chief, Gordon Tidemand, as usual stares at his salesman and feels he is a bit too shabbily dressed to do credit to the house he represents, but now as usual the man explains that upon his arrival in Tromsø he will purchase a splendid new summer suit from the finest clothier in town.

The interview was otherwise just as usual; sales had shown no satisfactory increase, especially of the more

expensive articles wherein real profit lay. Something must be the matter. Weren't the people up north willing to keep up with the trend of the times?

Oh yes, they were beginning to. But Finmark, after all, was Finmark. Up there one still had to dress according to the climate and daily occupation. But truth to tell, the ladies were already taking to high-heeled shoes.

The chief simply could not understand it; no orders for those marvelous corselettes he was offering. Heavy rose silk from breast to buttock which would fit the form like a glove. Why wouldn't such dainty garments sell? Expensive? Of course, but how could one expect to appear like a lady without one?

"They're too tight," says the traveler.

"Too what?"

"Too tight." And the traveler adds with a smile: "The ladies are so squeezed in they can't even swallow when they try to eat."

He should not have smiled, the chief does not care for his manner; he nods to indicate that the interview has come to an end. . . .

Outside in the store old Altmulig, the jack-of-all-trades, stands waiting. He desires a word from the chief, but he is respectful and religious and does not even expect a personal conversation with his employer; instead, he sends in one of the clerks with a question.

His modesty yields fruit; he is summoned at once into the office. Altmulig has been there but once before, the day he found service on the place.

"Well well, Altmulig, so you'd like to know what you're to do next, eh?"

"Ay."

"What are the workmen doing?"

"They're carting sea-weed for the fields."

The chief thinks a moment. "How about going over the seines and seeing that they're in perfect order?"

"Ay ay, sir!"

"No, never mind," says the chief. "For I don't suppose we'll be having any use for them for some time."

Altmulig: "If I may speak a word, there seems to me to be constant use for them."

"So?"

"For, by the grace of God, there are always herring in the sea."

"We couldn't get any people out with them, right now," says the chief. "They're just back from Lofoten, and they want to rest. They're hardly even willing to chop wood for their cook stoves."

Altmulig: "I can get them out."

The chief looks at him: "Do you think you could go out with them yourself?"

Altmulig shakes his head and crosses himself. "The Lord has made an old man of me," he says. "If only it had been before!"

The chief nods as a sign of conclusion. "Good, get busy with this thing, then. Collect the crews and send them out with the seines. Where do you think we ought to tell them to go?"

Altmulig: "North. I've faith in a place called Pol-den—"

Odd that the chief should have acquired such deep confidence in this old *altmuligmand* of his in the course of no more than a few months. They had talked together of one thing and another and the old man had shown that he knew a thing or two—he had ability and it had been profitable to take his word in a number of matters. Gordon Tidemand was apparently an executive of vision and optimism, but in truth he sometimes felt the need of expert advice. What for instance did he know about this business of his, aside from book-keeping and the marketing of luxuries! His learning consisted solely of technique, language and office routine, university courses, punctilio—he could read the labels on French pipes and spools of Eng-

lish thread—oh, he had his talents, without a doubt, but at bottom he had but little understanding of business and his intelligence was rather a minus quantity. He was, just what he appeared to be on the surface, a mongrel creature, a mixture of races, no strong characteristics in his nature, a little of this and that, a wizard in the classroom, perhaps, but out of touch with reality. Taken by and large, he was a quite ordinary individual, but he had a burning desire to be a *gentleman*, in the English sense of the word.

Such was the man, nought more. He was really in sore need of the advice old Altmulig was ready to offer him. Even his mother was something of a rod and a staff to comfort him.

"I'm sending out the seines," he said to his mother. "I've put Altmulig to rounding up the crews."

"Have you had news of herring?" she asked him.

"No. But, by the grace of God, there are always herring in the sea. If all I did was to wait for news, I'm afraid we'd all pretty much starve to death. We must do something, don't you think?"

"Things look rather dark, do I understand?"

"How can they possibly look bright? Store business and petty trading like that. People here really aren't buying anything, either. They're spinning and weaving themselves. Why, they live like mice in the field—they don't seem to belong to this human race of ours. Here we are, required to make a living off this little town of ours, this grotesque spectacle of a town, a mere port of loading, a few hundred people with no more than a copper each in their pockets. It's a mockery. I ought never to have come back home and taken over this business."

"Well, let's see once," says Gammelmoderen. "You've quite a bit outstanding on your books. Can't you try to get some of this in?"

"Get it in, mother? Set Lawyer Pettersen after these

people? Collection letters, court proceedings, all that sort of thing? I couldn't do that and you know it. Why, people would say that I was on the verge."

"You have the downery and the salmon fishery. You have one thing or another. And first and foremost, you have an entire town leasing land from you. That ought to mean no small yearly income."

"Yes, but that's the cursed trouble, don't you see?" exclaims the son. "I haven't been able to sell these lands so that something definite could be done with them. No one seems to have money enough to buy."

His mother: "Your father was opposed to selling off any of his land. He always said that if everything else failed, the rent from his lands would supply him with a solid yearly income, enough to live on at least."

"Trifling details!" fumed her son. "Small change!" he fumed. "The downery? I have the figures and I can show you. A couple of feather beds, a couple of quilts. The salmon fishery? Nothing."

"We used to have big fish there once," mumbled his mother, her mind seeming to dwell lingeringly on the past.

No, there was nothing much there. Segelfoss? What was there to the place? What lived and had its being there? Everything was dead. . . .

"Just take the mail I receive," explodes son Gordon—"no more than what might come for a sheriff or a school teacher. A letter is slipped into a yellow envelope and importantly addressed to me; one day it arrives and I open it—it has to do with a horse! One man haggles with another man about the price of a mere horse. And I am acquainted with neither them nor the horse. A few weeks ago I received a letter from a man who would like to come and manage the salmon net for me. Yes, that's the kind of mail I get! You don't find three men simply taking care of the mail here as you would in a regular place of business!"

Gammelmoderen: "Who was it that wrote you about the salmon net?"

"I don't remember. He said he had worked here before and knew all about the place."

"What was his name?"

"Alexander, or something like that."

Silence.

Gammelmoderen, approaching the matter indirectly: "Well, you are going to send out the seines again. Yes, it's to be hoped they prove lucky this time. . . ." She rises from her chair, takes a turn over to the window and glances out. "It's beginning to thaw in earnest, isn't it?" she says, simply to have something to say. She is restless. Not until she is on the point of leaving does she suddenly remember the point about the man and the salmon net. "Oh yes, Gordon, you must get that man back on the place," she says. "He was the ablest man your father ever had. My, how he used to work the salmon net! Your father used to ship salmon off to the cities, all the way to Trondhjem. Smoked salmon. Good money. What did you say the man's name was?"

"Alexander, I believe. What difference does it make?" mumbles the son, hunting about on his desk. "Here's the letter. His name is Otto Alexander. I didn't even bother answering him."

"Yes, but you should do so at once. Sit right down and drop him a line. He will bring you in profits at once, you'll see. The salmon net certainly isn't out now, is it? Besides, we could easily use a salmon or two for our own table."

"Of course, if you say so," concedes her son. "I can just as well get the fellow here."

Within the week Altmulig had kept his word and organized a full crew for each of the seining boats. But neither of the two bosses seemed to rely very much upon

the old man's word and they called together to consult with the chief.

"Yes," said Gordon Tidemand. "He told you what I wanted."

Ay, but he had made strange signs and crosses with his fingers, like as though he was casting a spell, or such-like.

They were not to concern themselves over that.

And then he had pointed out on the chart where they were to lie, one seine here, the other there. But, might they ask in all humility, wouldn't such a business seem like a personal affront to the Almighty? Weren't they to move along from bay to bay and use their spy glass and scan the sea and read the signs and do their best?

The chief rang and gave orders for Altmulig to be brought into the office. "Show me the chart!" he said to the men.

It was a bit of coastal chart borrowed from the sloop. The chief studied it, pretended that he understood it perfectly, put up a grand appearance, picked up a rule and measured: "Here is Polden, this point here!"

"Yes, but—" replied the seine-bosses. "But he said that one of us should drift about in this locality, near a place called Fuglværøy. And in both places both boats should simply lie still."

The chief measured again, nodded and said: "That's right. Those are exactly the orders he got from me."

Altmulig entered the room softly, laid his cap beside him on the floor over by the door and, when recognized, stepped forward and bowed.

Gad, what a courteous fellow this old man is! Gordon Tidemand must have thought. "Your men here don't seem to understand our orders very well," he said. "Would you be good enough to repeat them!"

No trouble at all! Altmulig repeated his explanations and stood by his guns; he mentioned Polden and Fugl-

værøy, mentioned exact distances, mentioned the direction of the sea currents.

I wonder why he doesn't stand over here and put on a few airs? the chief thought slyly to himself. "Won't you step over and look at the chart?" he asked.

Altmulig took out his nose-glasses, but found no use for them. He smiled and said: "I have the chart right here in my head."

"Ay," said the seine-bosses. "But that we should lie still—"

Altmulig stood by his guns: "Ay, for seven days and seven nights is what I told you. If you have not shot your seines after seven days and seven nights, move seven miles north, up toward Senjen. But you will shoot before then, I know!" Again he crossed himself, both over his forehead and over his breast.

"That's odd!" mumbled the bosses. "And why are we to lie exactly at these places and not move and not scan all the sea?"

Altmulig delivered himself like a true prophet and seer: "For it is exactly there the herring will turn up if there are any at all in those parts. Don't you dare to doubt me! The herring, she knows her way through the sea. Whales and other vermin can force her off her course, but that you can see when it happens and move on after the shoal."

"Have you conjured up herring there?" asks one seine-boss in desperation.

"Ay, for if so, we'll have nothing at all to do with this business!" chimes in the other.

Altmulig looks up at the chief and asks: "I don't know—was there anything more—?"

"No."

He bows, picks up his cap over by the door and leaves the room.

Gad, what discipline! Probably picked up from the

skipper of some big ship, Gordon Tidemand thought to himself again. Turning to his men, he curtly remarks: "There! Now you've had my orders explained to you a second time!"

Even the chief must have found Altmulig a bit too mystical, but he let the matter go. Why not follow out the old fellow's directions! The last time the seiners had been out, they had craned their necks and stared about the sea, they had rowed hither and yon and stuck their noses into all the old herring coves they knew of, but they had come home empty-handed. Now let's see this time! No seine in existence is a pot of gold each year, but every seine has an equal chance of stumbling onto the good fortune which means immediate wealth.

CHAPTER FIVE

DURING the spring Gordon Tidemand began putting up a residence back up in the mountains. He called it a hunting-lodge, but it was anything but a mere cabin, it was a regular house, a summer residence—in the event that his family might like to spend a few months “in the country.” He was busy with a large corps of workers and the work was progressing rapidly. There were masons, carpenters, and painters; a veranda with a truly dizzying outlook was added and, after that, a flag pole. For the time being, these would be all.

Gordon Tidemand had set much in motion since the amazing coup scored by his seiners. Oh, here was a man with an eye for progress and activity! And now at last he had the means, for the unthinkable, the almost unbelievable had actually come to pass: the capture of a gigantic shoal of herring off Fuglværøy, the miracle which had been reported in all the papers and which had turned the entire countryside upside-down. What else save the power of fate and good fortune had it been! Nor was it for any true master of Segelfoss to shovel vast sums of money into his pockets without putting them to some good use! So he ran his steamer pier far out into deep water to accommodate the largest of ships; by the expansion of store credit he extended a helping hand to many poor folk throughout the parish. There was the type of fellow he was! He even weighed in his mind a plan which he and old Altmulig had once discussed: a dairy in town to supply the entire district round about.

Yes, to be sure, he was good for a thing or two, but his mother shook her head; and when he began building his mountain home she stood there wringing her hands. Oh that Gordon, to think of moving out to the country,

away from Segelfoss Manor! Well then, why didn't Fru Juliet step in? No, how could she do that? She was the mistress of the house, a love bird, a mother, so beautiful, so sweet—she was only a woman, and her figure was lumpy again! No, it was not her place to tie her husband's hands. Gammelmoderen, on the other hand, did absolutely nothing to stifle her voice; she was a woman of manifold experience and was bursting with advice. The widow of Theodore paa Bua did her reasonable best to restrain her son's taste for extravagance, though for the time being she decided against having it out with him. On the contrary, she had reason to stand in well with him, to be good friends with him. Had he not heeded her advice about taking on that man, Otto Alexander, he who was so handy at bringing in salmon for the family table and who didn't mind smoking fish out in the smokehouse even though it was late at night?

Gammelmoderen nad become younger than ever; she went fluttering along the roads like a young girl and again she took to wearing a gold medallion about her neck. Bold she was indeed; the talk about her and a certain Gypsy lad had long since died away, but of late it had sprung up anew. —“Notice how she goes about singing?”—“That's no way to do!”—“She stays with him out in the smokehouse, she goes aboard the sloop *Soria* with him, they have something to drink aboard, they are worse than any young couple!”—“And to think she has no shame in her!”

And that she surely had not; Gammelmoderen simply lacked all sense of shame, she managed her personal affairs with a conscience as clear as crystal—she was a daredevil, to say the least. But to object seriously to what her son was doing was, of course, not fitting or proper.

“I see so many strange workmen with picks and shovels,” she said. “Are they working for you?”

“Yes. They're from the south. They are road-builders. They are laying a road up to the lodge.”

"What, a carriage road? Listen to me now, Gordon, wouldn't a footpath really do just as well?"

"No," her son curtly replied.

And his mother gave in at once: "Ay, possibly you are right about that. What good would a mountain lodge be without a road leading up to it! . . ."

It seems that Gordon Tidemand had happened to mention his road-building project to his right-hand man, Altmulig; he had stated that he was of a mind to hire some expert people who would first of all do a bit of surveying and then stake out the route.

Ay, Altmulig had indicated that such would not prove so difficult.

"So?" asked the chief. "Do you think you could do it yourself?"

"Such work is right in my line," replied Altmulig.

Oh that undefeatable fellow! Nothing seemed to leave him at a loss! There were many ways of going about it. A footpath presented no great problems.

"What, a footpath? Really, I say!" sneered the chief.

"Oh, it's a carriage road you'd be wanting?"

"Of course, for we must figure on the transportation of provisions and equipment. I imagine the family will prefer living up there during the hottest part of the summer."

"How stupid of me!" said Altmulig. "Well, do you want the line to go up gradually in a long curve, or would you rather take it short with a steep grade?"

"You may decide that for yourself. So far as I personally am concerned, the question of grade is immaterial, but I suppose my wife might occasionally enjoy walking back and forth."

"We may have to blast our way along part of the way; it's pretty rough country up there. I can take a little trip up the mountain right away and have a look around, if you say so."

The chief nodded. "And while you're up there at the

house, you might decide whether we ought to put up an iron fence at the edge of the steep. For the children's sake, you know. . . ."

An invaluable assistance, that Altmulig. His very manner made a strong appeal to Gordon Tidemand. "Right away," he had said—as if he might be asked to quit his place at any time, though it was he alone the chief could thank for the fortune he had made in herring! Had he put on airs and strutted, had he jumped up and cracked his heels together the day the wire had arrived from the seiners? Not at all. When the chief had read him the telegram, he had been moved to great depths, apparently; he had crossed himself, he had swallowed a lump in his throat. And his lips had trembled and his eyes had assumed a tint of washed-out blue. But his emotion had passed immediately; he had nodded and said: "Oh, so they shot the two seines together and closed in a bay, did they? What else does it say?"

"Only that the herring are 7 — 8 and 9 — 10. But I don't believe I know what that means."

"That's important," Altmulig had said. "That means so many herring by weight. They are average and better than average fish!" And in a flash he had become level-headed and practical, a man who knew the next steps to be taken: Buyers, buyers! Wires to every town and city! Salt! Barrels! Order the sloop *Soria* to clear for the north this very day—"That is, if you agree with me!" he had been careful to add.

The chief had stared at him long. No hint of fishing about for a compliment, not a single boastful word. But the miracle itself, the successful gamble, these had fascinated the old man and he had said: "What a pity I couldn't have been there to see it!"

That had been all.

Now Gordon Tidemand was not lacking in appreciation and it had been as clear as day to him what a debt of

gratitude he owed Altmulig. It had been his desire to make a great fuss over him, to give a feast, a banquet, in his honour, but Altmulig had respectfully declined. Since arriving on the place the old man had lived in a single room in the servants' hall, but the chief had promptly invited him to occupy one of the guest rooms in the Manor itself, a room with a full-length gold mirror, a carpet on the floor, a mahogany bed graced with gilded angels, a decorative clock on the mantelpiece. . . . Altmulig had simply shaken his head to all this and humbly and piously said no.

All in all an odd individual, this man. See there, how he still continues to work about the place with his usual care and diligence, with never a thought to spare himself, with never a thought for his age, or even a request for a raise in pay. The chief had of course offered a raise of his own accord, but—

There was no reason for that, the man had answered.

But couldn't he find some use for a particular sum then, say? Wouldn't he like to start up something for himself, or possibly make a certain purchase?

"Oh yes. But with your permission, let's say no more about that!"

The chief had then handed him a sum large enough to have set him up in one business or another, but though several weeks had already passed, the old fellow had continued his position as general handy-man, altering not one detail of his daily routine. The only difference was that some one had seen him down at the post office sending divers money orders abroad.

Drilling and blasting and the singing of men up the side of the mountain, an air of festivity marking the progress of the work. There are several gangs of workmen along the stretch of road under construction; some blasting away rock, others working with cement; some digging

up gravel, others wheeling it away. Altmulig goes stalking up and down the entire line, a thoughtful, intelligent foreman.

One day he says: "Blast this rock. It's been in our way long enough."

The men did not wish to blast it. The rock weighed well over a thousand pounds, but the workmen were husky and preferred wheeling it away just as it was. "Blast a mere pebble like that?" they said. Altmulig looked at them; they showed that they had been drinking, their whiskey had gone to their heads. In the course of their struggle to lift the rock into a wheel-barrow the wheel broke and the barrow was a wreck.

"Blast that stone!" ordered Altmulig.

No, there was one thing they simply refused to do; their dander was up and they would show that rock its place, they would finish it off man to man! "What the hell!" they said. "That's one of those stones that sit there just making themselves heavy for spite. Give in? Not on your life!"

Five men succeeded at length in hoisting the stone into a wheel-barrow and wheeling it off to a fill-in. They came staggering back with triumph beaming on their faces. One man appeared to have injured his hand.

Altmulig called to a member of another gang and said: "Go back and blast that stone!"

"Now?" cried the others. "The stone isn't in your way now, is it?"

The stone was not drilled, it was blasted with a direct charge.

But the workmen refused to pass up the matter, they muttered over their boss's conduct and asked him if he were crazy. He made no reply. They called him an old fool and stepped up to him. Altmulig backed up against the wall of the cliff in order to protect himself from the rear, two of the worst trouble-makers in close pursuit.

They desired to have him speak up and explain himself, he was simply not to stand there with an important look on his face and refuse to account to them, they offered to throw him over the tall rampart, they shook their fists in his face. . . .

Suddenly Altmulig pulls a revolver from his hip-pocket and discharges it in the air. The two started back at the unexpected sound of the shot. "Are you shooting?" they yelled. But the look on the old man's face must have given them some cause for alarm—he was as pale as death and he was grinding his false teeth in rage.—"What's the sense of taking it that way?" they said and immediately tamed down. "We didn't mean any harm by it."

"Quit standing there chewing the rag!" cried their comrades to get them away.

During the noon knock-off and after they had worked off the effects of their intoxication, Altmulig stepped up and spoke to them: "You fellows are hired to work and obey orders. There isn't one of you here who can take the responsibility of going against orders, for you aren't that kind of people. Here you've gone to work and wrecked a wheel-barrow and injured a man, and what good did that do you? A wheel-barrow is not built to carry half a ton and a man with crushed fingers can't work."

Silence.

"Ay, but to blast a stone afterwards——!" they said.

"That's the way we show discipline at sea."

The men continued to mutter: "Well, we aren't at sea here. And when you shot that revolver—don't you know you might have hit one of us?"

"That would have been the least of my tricks—if I wanted to!" said Altmulig.

And looking at him they could see that he meant what he said.

But it was not long before peace again prevailed along the entire line.

Other things happened, as well. A bull came bellowing up the stretch of finished road, one of the manorial cattle, a powerful brute. It behaved itself like a fool, stood pawing up the road, dug its horns into the piles of gravel at the side and awoke the dead with its frightful bellowings.

"Go chase away that mosquito, will you!" some one said to a short, wiry, broad-shouldered little fellow from Trondhjem, a man whose name was Francis.

"Ho, so I suppose you think I'm afraid!" said Francis, starting off with a spade in his hand.

Altmulig was at the moment coming up the line and immediately cried: "Stop! What the devil are you thinking of!"

The bull let out a bellow to indicate how deeply he detested this Francis person, but neither bull nor man would retreat. "Stop!" screeched Altmulig again, but the Trønder refused to heed his warning; instead he picked up a stone and threw it. It reached its mark, but it produced no more of an impression on the animal than a mere drop of water. Suddenly the bull takes it into his head to charge. His tail outstretched, earth and pebbles flying out behind, he comes at his adversary and in a trice Francis is sailing through the air, past his comrades, over the parapet, down the mountain slope.

Finished!

The bull pauses for a moment in amazement. The end of the combat already? Then, for lack of something better to do, he gores the road with his horns, throws back his head and bellows.

Altmulig is ready with his orders: "Fetch some chains!" he commands.

Higher up along the line there were some chains used for anchoring the fascines when blasting was going on near the house. Several of the men began running up after them, apparently glad to be able to retreat from the

danger zone. The remainder of the gang crouched as best they could behind rocks and portions of jutting cliff.

When the chains arrived they were fastened together with steel wire and carried in a circle about the animal. The entire gang took part in the operation. One of the men thought it best to stretch the chain across the narrow road and thus bar the way. "That won't work, a bull can jump pretty high. We've got to catch him!" said Alt-mulig. Gradually the circle closed in; these many people yelling at each other at the top of their lungs seemed to confuse the bull—he snorted, but stood still. When he at last decided to launch a further attack, he found the chain encircling one of his forelegs and he was forced to resign from the field. Two men led him peacefully down the road to the Manor.

At this point the Trønder made his reappearance; that wiry little Francis came crawling back up the slope and asked for a hand to help him over the parapet. "Can't you jump it?" some one asked in fun. "No, for I'm all cut up," he replied. Ho, that devil of a fellow, he was anything but unscathed! There was a bloody gash in his head and he had a most unhealthy look about him. But he had come through with his life, though he himself could not understand how he had managed it. He was a tough little chap and kept referring to the affair in a humorous vein. "I'm all gravel inside and out!" he said. "Look here, I'm spitting gravel. How about some water, lads!"

"That's a mean hole in your head," they said. "You must have scrubbed up the entire landscape, the way it looks."

"Ay, but let's talk of that later. Give me some water now!"

He drew in a deep breath and was on the point of fainting. No, he had not come out of his bull-fighting venture unscathed. Later, Doctor Lund examined him and

discovered that he had two broken ribs and had a serious wound in his head.

The people of Segelfoss Manor came up to watch the road-builders at work. There were not only Gordon Tide-mand and his wife Juliet, but Frøken Marna as well, she who had been visiting her sister married to Romeo Knoff further south. She was as blond as her mother, Gammelmoderen, and somewhat older than Gordon—she was well on in her twenties now, a handsome lady, quiet in her speech, a bit too quiet, somewhat sluggish, in fact.

And the people from town came up, too: Druggist Holm, the chief telegraphist and his wife, Postmaster Hagen and his wife. These visits of the ladies always acted as a tonic upon the workmen; the blasters would go about drilling for their charges with much whistling and vocal refrain, and the masons seemed unable to work their tiniest trowels without shouting as loud as they could. Frøken Marna did much to stimulate them; ay, to the last man they all seemed hopelessly in love with her.

"You were singing so lustily I really had to come up and see what you were doing," she might coyly remark.

One day it is Adolf who replies to her: "Would you like to take a few cracks on this drill?"

"I could never hit it with the hammer, I'm sure!" she says with a shake of her head.

"Come on, have a try!"

"Oh no, you must be mad! I know I should hurt your hand."

But the fellow is head over heels in love with her by this time and he begins at once to talk foolishness: "It would make my hand feel so good, if only *you* might manage to crush it!"

She stood there smiling at this, but with downcast eyes which gave her a sly, thoughtful look.

The workers undertook to wonder amongst themselves why Frøken Marna had never married and they asked each other what the matter with her could be. "You'll see," they said. "She's the kind who can never find anyone good enough for her. Isn't that right?" The Trønder Francis is somewhat more crude in his view of the matter; he is strolling about with a bandage about his head and, because he is enjoying workman's compensation, he affects an air of great luxury. "Unless," he suggests prettily, "she can't work up any sensation for a man?"

Adolf, blindly infatuated, stands up for her and strikes a blow in her defence. "There isn't anything the matter with her, that much I can say for myself. But you always were a filthy-minded swine, Francis—you can't even look at a skirt without saying something offensive!"

And then one day came Davidsen, editor and publisher of the *Segelfoss News*, of a mind to write a bit of a story about the new road. As Altmulig was nowhere in sight, he turned to the workmen themselves, took out paper and pencil and began asking important questions. Now it so happened that Editor-Publisher Davidsen was an unpopular character with the men. They did not read his paper, had themselves a nose for news, and had soon learned what the people in town thought of him. He was in truth an able man and a toiler; he had one of his children, a small daughter, to help him in the office, and together they would set up the little sheet each week and it was thus they made their slender living. But no one respected him for all that, perhaps because he was always something of a spectacle in the shabby clothes he was compelled to wear. And inasmuch as fundamentally he was no more than a type-setter and printer, he could by no stretch of the imagination be considered as a person of quality. But he held sound, progressive ideas and no end of social vision, facts which were most apparent when, in meetings

of the local commune, he was always able to triumph over the school teachers who knew nothing, thought nothing, were content to be merely radical.

Poor Davidsen, a tall, thin man in ragged clothes, the father of five children, the owner of two cases of type and a hand-press, a pauper thus, a louse.

The workers declined to answer his questions seriously and when he realized that they were only poking fun at him, he made the grave error of becoming annoyed and stooping to argue with them. He got nowhere in this regard, for theirs was the voice of the rabble, arrogant, illogical, deprecating—they winked at each other like baboons and laughed the man down. Francis was unable to work, but he was still able to exert himself in deviltry, and he hit upon a most amusing notion: he stealthily picked up a light charge of blasting powder and exploded it behind the editor's back. Splendid, splendid! The workers all howled with merriment and the editor found himself squatting some distance away.

"You shouldn't have done that!" he said.

Francis, roaring with glee: "We're blasting up here on the mountain!"

"But not without warning, are you?"

Silence.

Davidsen then committed a further error in judgment: he addressed the gang with a bit of a lecture. "You are all too easily pleased with yourselves," he began. "Was that anything to laugh at? This man here is merely crude, can't you see that? I pity poor wretches like you who can laugh and have a good time over such an incident as this! It is in this particular at least that you excel us others: crudeness, and the ability to exercise it without self-disgust. In all our struggles that is the only weapon you have at your command. You are too easily satisfied! What you really need is a sense of decency, my good lads! What you need is the will to rise above your essential crudity

of nature, but this you lack entirely. Even the negro is gifted with this power of buoyancy and has the desire to compete for the decent honours of this world. But you, my good friends, all you have is the negro's flippant tongue, his voracity——"

They interrupt him: "We haven't got his black skin, either."

"Our workers should be a proud class, and pride means honest simp——"

"Give him another dose of that powder, Francis!"

"Farewell, my lads, think over what I have said!" Herr Davidsen bowed and left them.

"Did you ever see such an idiot!" said the workers. "Think over what I said! Come on, lads, let's sit right down and think over what that fool said! Hahaha——"

And in turn came Lawyer Pettersen aloft to inspect the road. "There's that fellow they call 'Buttonhead'!" cried the workers, who already knew all about him. But here was a man they respected; they knew that he was hard about forcing collections, that he never hesitated to throw some poor wretch into bankruptcy and that he cashed in big profits from dealing in the life blood of others. Oh, of course, he enjoyed their respect, for now he was at the head of the Segelfoss Savings Bank—by Gad, he was a bank president!

And in turn came Doctor Lund and his wife. . . .

CHAPTER SIX

DISTRICT-DOCTOR LUND was acquainted with a number of the working men; he had cared for several of them and each and all now touched their caps in civil greeting. A subduing wind seemed to sweep over the entire gang when their eyes fell upon the doctor's lady; they removed their hats to the last man and those furthest away leaned toward one another and whispered: "Say, just get a good look at her!" Fru Lund herself stood staring after Altmulig who was busy over at the tool-chest.

"Do you notice whom that man looks like?" she asked.

"Who—he? But that must be the foreman," the doctor replied.

"He looks so like—he looks like——"

"Yes, my dear, but what earthly difference does it make!"

The doctor turned to converse with the workmen; he spoke with his patient, the man from Trondhjem. "Where was it you were pitched over the wall?" he asked. He was shown the spot and he shook his head: "It might have gone far more seriously with you than it did," he remarked.

Fru Lund makes her way over to the tool-chest where Altmulig is busy with something. She looks at him for a time, then says softly:

"Good-day, August!"

Altmulig glances up, peers carefully about him and makes no reply.

"Isn't your name August?"

"What my name is—they call me Altmulig here."

"I recognized you," says Fru Lund.

Altmulig begins pawing about in the tool-chest.

Fru Lund: "Don't you want me to recognize you?"

"Leave things alone! I'm not the kind of man you should know."

"Hahaha," she laughs. "My name is Esther—don't you remember me from Polden?"

Altmulig, uneasily: "Don't let the doctor—I mean don't let everybody—but anyway don't let the doctor hear what you say!"

"Karsten, come here! Here's an old friend of ours!"

The doctor was no less interested than she. He too recognized August, shook his hand warmly and laughed because the fellow had wished to shield his identity. They spoke for a long time together and August remarked that it was not pleasant to be reminded of his days in Polden—he had not been all he ought to have been, whilst there.

"How so, how so?" asked the doctor. "You acted in all justice and decency toward everyone up there."

"That's one thing I certainly did not!"

"Oh yes, that is to say, Paulina—wasn't her name Paulina?"

"It was," said his wife.

"Yes, she cleared up everything for you. Moreover, with your own money. You don't owe a soul any money. Didn't you know that?"

"No. I don't know anything about it. My own money, did you say?"

"So you never knew about that! And there was loads of it left over, too, I have heard."

August, kindling: "So they got the factory going at last, perhaps?"

"Why, where have you been all this time?" asked the doctor. "The factory? That I really do not know. Was it a factory, Esther?"

"Yes. You had stock in it yourself, but you got your money back. Don't you remember?"

"They sold it then, perhaps?" asked August. "But that was stupid. If I had been there, they would never have done that. It was a good factory as I remember. Steel beams inside and an iron roof."

"Yes, and you won a goodly sum of money," said the doctor. "In a lottery or whatever it was. Esther, you know more about it than I do, don't you?"

"Yes, a large sum of money. Paulina took care of it for you."

"Hm," said August.

The doctor glanced at his watch. "We must be going. I have office hours beginning at four. Come over and see us, August, and we'll tell you all we know. I remember how we used to have a chat or two back in the old days. It's splendid to see you again. Why, great Scott, to think you never knew anything about it! Was it as frightfully long ago as all that? How long ago can it have been, Esther? Well well, no matter. Have you been down in South America again, August? Drop over and see us real soon; we have two boys, and they'll certainly be interested to hear you."

Both the doctor and his wife gave August their hands and departed.

The workmen had been burning with curiosity and they now undertook to ask their boss a question or two. And the boss himself—no, how could he deny it, they were old acquaintances of his, friends of his younger days when he had been something of a man! The old codger had been lifted back into the sun, he had got his name back, he was August, a human being again, he could look in the mirror and recognize his face once more. How long ago it all seemed! It really might have been only a dream. Oh yes, they had been very dear friends of his, his best friends, in fact. . . .

"The Fru as well?" they asked.

"The Fru? That Esther, you mean? She's sat on my lap more than once. Why, I'm her godfather."

"She's as pretty as a picture!"

"It was me more than anyone else who was responsible for getting her married to the doctor."

"How's that, didn't he want her?"

"Oh yes, I suppose he did. But just the same, I had to step in and fix things for them."

Francis: "Then I suppose it was that he got next to her too soon, eh?"

Adolf: "God, Francis, but you are a swine! She wasn't that kind!"

"No," corroborated August. "In that direction, she was like the finest lady in silk and gold."

"How funny it can go," the men said. "Here you run into them again!"

"Such you may say and be right! Naturally I've known right along that they were here, but I didn't want to give myself away to them."

"Why not, Boss?"

"It just wasn't right. I was not up to their level."

"Oh, you're all right!" they said to encourage him.

August waved the suggestion aside. "Now?" he flared. "No, now I'm nothing at all. But it was another matter in my younger days. An enormous factory—hundreds of men working for me."

"No, is that right?"

"I say no more," mumbled August and resumed his pawing about in the tool-chest.

The meeting with the doctor and his wife had brought August back to himself and given him something to occupy his mind. He had money left over, they had said; all his debts in Polden had been paid up and there was money left over. Wonder where it is, he mused.

To be sure he had not exactly been on his knees before; Segelfoss had been a cosy haven after his many wanderings—board and lodging from the very beginning and now at last a goodly sum of money given him by the chief. But what did such things amount to for a man of August's South American background! After sending the last postal money order abroad—oh, there had been so many of these and no country had been forgotten—he had had little enough money left. Some of it had also gone for a bit of red and green dress material for that Valborg from Øira for the reason that her husband, Jørn Mathildesen had lain abjectly on the ground at his feet and begged for it. A bit more had gone to buy a horse for Tobias who had had a fire. One thing after another, and the money had leaked through his fingers; some of it he had lost at cards. At cards? Ay, cards had taken their toll. And is that to be wondered at? Was there anyone who could reasonably expect that August would be unfamiliar with and deeply opposed to gaming and speculation? Wager and win, risk it and lose it, throw in another stake, keep the pot boiling, play. . . .

He had fallen so innocently into the game. The gardener Steffen and a few of the small dealers from town had formed the habit of dropping into his room of an evening, and what better form of amusement could they have hit upon? This old handy-man on the place had traveled far and wide and, good Heavens, what those eyes of his had not seen in the way of people and birds and business and champions and kinds of trees and mountain ranges! Wild, wild, no sense of order or proportion to his recollections! And the Gypsy, Otto Alexander had also been a frequent visitor—he would call on the evenings when he was able to get out of smoking salmon with Gammelmoderen.

One evening when they are all sitting there together the Gypsy lets those keen eyes of his range about the room.

At length they fall upon a ponderous tome and beside it on the shelf a miniature volume.

Thus it all began.

"What kind of a book is that, Altmulig?" he asks, regarding the larger.

"A Russian Bible," replies August.

"Let us see it!" they all said.

August adjusts his *pince-nez* and exhibits the Bible to his guests, directs their particular attention to the full leather binding and the brass corners. "I don't want that you shall handle it with any old hands," he says and begins turning the pages reverently. Occasionally he pauses to cross himself and occasionally he turns the book to impress the others with the remarkable characters in which it is printed.

"Can you read that thing?" they ask.

August smiles benignly and indicates that it would be the very least of his tricks to read the book from cover to cover.

"But why a Russian Bible?"

"There's more power in it," said August.

"How more power? How do you mean?"

"It's to lay your hand on when you take an oath. Our Bibles are no good for that. And you can bind and absolve with this one."

They talked a bit about that. August was full of secrets regarding the power of his Bible to "bind and absolve," but he had with his own eyes seen how great this power was.

"Will you sell it?" asks one of the small dealers. Oh that picayune soul, he was thinking of reselling the holy book at a profit! Heavens, what an unscrupulous fellow!

August wound up the conversation with high ceremony: here now he had this Russian Bible, and never so long as he lived would he let it out of his possession.

The Gypsy again ransacks the room with that piercing

gaze of his. "And that little book there, what kind of thing is that? Well, I'll be—— I mean——"

"That's a prayer book," August answers.

"It's a deck of cards!" corrects the Gypsy, reaching up on the shelf.

There lay the deck in full sight and handy for use, so there was nothing odd in the fact that the Gypsy had discovered it and picked it up in his hand.

"Quit handling everything you can lay your hands on in here!" said August.

"A deck of cards!" the Gypsy repeated.

August: "Impossible! I don't own any stuff like that. Is it witchcraft? I had a prayer book up there on the shelf, and now it's gone, and a deck of cards lies there in its place!"

"Hahaha!" they all laughed. "Let's try out the cards," they said. "Come on, Altmulig, deal them out!"

August crossed himself: "I won't dirty my hands with them!"

So they began playing without him whilst he stood looking on. They took out their small change and played for this, they won and lost, August looking on; they waxed eager, they swore loudly and became excited, one of the party threw down a whole *krone*. . . .

"I can just as well take a hand or two," said August.

His money seemed to have wings; one *krone* after another found its way into someone else's pocket. At first he sat there as unwillingly as he could make it seem, the expression on his face one of the utmost piety. He was forever hesitant to handle such a filthy thing as money and often he would leave his winnings in the pot for the next deal—double!—it was as though these fellows had dragged him by the hair into this miserable game for *kroner* and *øre* in which he was not the least bit interested. But the others were full of excitement, slapped their cards

down on the table and their profanity had by this time exceeded all reasonable bounds. August stuck in some money, hesitantly.

"You lose," they said.

"Do you think that is losing?" he replied. "Ho, that's giving away money. Let the gift go!"

In one respect he was most austere: they were not to sit there chattering and holding up the game. He did not look, as he sat there, like one who would blow out his brains as soon as his money ran out—no, no, it was the game, the game itself which fascinated him. He nodded his head with vehement pleasure whenever the game was fast and close and he had begun to reach out his hands after the cards even before they were passed out by the dealer.

"There you lose again," they said.

"A gift! Let it go, let it go!"

"Hadn't you better cross yourself?" they asked, teasingly. "And what good to you is that Russian Bible of yours now?" they asked.

Oh those fools, those ninnies, they thought he minded the few coins he was losing, that he was worried and that he would go and jump over the falls the moment he should be broke. They doubled themselves up with laughter and joy each time they won a *krone* from him and could slip it into their vest pockets. Then August laid his hands on the cards without looking at them, placed two old hands over the deck and prayed unobserved. Ay, unobserved.

His luck changed and he won a few hands. This made him reckless and his old eyes blazed feverishly in his head. Call or double! he prayed again unseen.

They looked at each other, shook their heads and threw down their cards.

"Call or double!" he challenged the Gypsy.

The Gypsy accepted the challenge and picked up his cards again, picked up one card too many and like lightning threw down another.

"That's cheating!" the others cried. "Give that one back!"

August, alone whom the act concerned, said nothing. The Gypsy's swarthy face was unusually pale and his mouth had begun to tremble.

When it was seen that August had lost, the others again cried out: "Ay, but Otto here cheated! You fellows should have thrown in your hands and let us in on a new deal. You picked up a jack and threw down a seven-spot," they said to the Gypsy.

"I would have won without that jack," said the Gypsy.

They disputed the point for a time, August paid up without opening his mouth, but that was the end of the game.

One of the merchants tried to sneak off with the deck when he left, but August halted him. "Come on with that deck of cards!" he said.

"But you said it wasn't yours, didn't you?"

"Come on with that deck of cards!" August repeated. . . .

Small happenings, trivial disagreements, but they continued to play of an evening. Others dropped in for a game; one evening Jørn Mathildesen dropped in. He never had a penny to his name but August gave him a *krone* to keep watch outside the door and to tap on the window were any of the road gang to be seen approaching. Instinct and experience had taught August never to play cards with those working for him.

He lost and won and lost again. Now and then it would go hard with him and he would be forced to lay out a whole banknote, but he would never allow it to be understood that such had fazed him. On the contrary, he preferred to create the impression that these evening games

were for him but a pleasant diversion. Of late he had begun to give serious consideration to a couple of the postal money orders he had sent abroad. Heavens, but they had cost him a pretty penny, it seemed, now that he had but a slender remnant of that tidy sum he had received. But a remnant it was, for all that—and what could he do with a remnant? What better way of using it than simply to gamble it away!

One evening after supper, he took a stroll over to the doctor's place where he was warmly received, and regally entertained. Doctor Lund had already spoken to the magistrate regarding the sum of money August had up in Polden. It had possibly been deposited to his account in a bank up in Bodø or Trondhjem. It had already been sent for——

"You're a lucky man to have money drop into your hands from out of the sky in days like these."

"How much do you suppose there is?"

The doctor didn't know and all his wife had heard talk of back home in her native village was that it had been a large sum.

August fell to chatting with Fru Lund about Poldeners, living and dead. Now and then she had received a letter full of news from her mother.

He inquired after Edevart.

"Edevart?"

"Edevart Andreassen. You know him."

Oh, but he had been dead these past twenty years—didn't August know anything about anyone? Edevart had gone sailing north to overtake August when the latter had fled from Polden. Alone in an open boat in the teeth of a gale from the south-west. He was lost. He had even borrowed the mail-boat. Well, that had been fifteen years ago, at least.

August is silent and thoughtful for a long time, then

he speaks as though talking to himself: "Ay, it was the devil and all that he had to die."

The doctor's two sons came into the room; perhaps they had been told things in advance, for they sat right down and began listening. But as nothing was said of South America and robber bands they stayed but a short time.

"And Paulina, she's still alive and doing business in that little store of hers," Fru Lund went on. "And Ane Maria is still alive, but old Karolus is dead. And Ezra is a wealthy farmer with land galore. And Seine-owner Gabrielsen——"

August: "I am mindful to ask if those little spruce trees of mine are still living and growing?"

"I really don't know," said Fru Lund. However, she appeared touched, so possibly she knew very well what had happened to those Christmas trees of August's.

And the factory down by the fjord and the fine houses he had built there in Polden and the fish rocks he had ordered cleared of turf that they might be used as a drying grounds——

The two boys again entered the room and sat down to listen. No change, only more tedious talk about Polden.

The doctor asked: "About yourself, August, have you been down to South America lately?"

"No."

"Well, where were you last?"

"Last? Ay, it was Latvia, I believe. It isn't so easy for me to remember all the countries I've visited. I've been in so many cities, hundreds of different climates——"

Ah, now he's off! the boys must have thought to themselves.

"Yes, you've been through a lot in your day," said the Doctor. "How were things in Latvia?"

"Latvia, Esthonia, Lithuania—all those Baltic states—in fact, the Baltic Sea itself——"

"Eh?"

August repeated his ancient hatred for the Baltic Sea: "It's more treacherous than a Bengal tiger and it's not fit to sail on. Just a filthy cesspool! And it's drying up, too, did you know?"

The two lads laughed aloud and were now certain that August was off on one of his yarns. But nothing more came of their hopes. No, neither the doctor nor his wife were able to pry a yarn or even a full-fledged lie out of August any more. He was no longer August of Polden; he was an old man now, and religious into the bargain.

Fru Lund: "What is it they call you here at Segelfoss? I heard the name some time ago, but I never realized that it could be you. Aren't you going to call yourself August any more?"

"Ay, August is, of course, my Christian name. But Altmulig is my every-day title here. It was me myself who told the chief to set me down as an *altmuligmand*."

"That chief of yours is quite a man, isn't he?"

"The chief?" August cried. "Say, there isn't a more remarkable fellow to be found in this world. I've been inside his private office and he can look through three thick ledgers at once and keep right on talking to me. I've seen it with my own eyes!"

The doctor: "That road up the mountain is going to cost him a pretty penny, isn't it?"

"Ay, it's a real road we are building."

"When will it be completed?"

"That's for the Lord to decide. We're working on it as hard as we can. The chief has placed this trust in me and given me a big gang of workmen to put it through."

Sound entertainment was now out of the question and the small boys left the room for good.

The doctor: "What was I going to say, August? I saw you on the street one day talking with the daughter of old Tobias. Do you know her?"

August did not answer immediately; he blushed and ap-

peared somewhat bashful. "How's that?—Do I know her? No. Hm, so you saw us, eh?"

"There's a family that's always in trouble."

August: "I understood as much from her. She was complaining to me."

"One misfortune after another in their lives. Now they've lost their horse. Their house burned down and that looked bad enough, but now it seems as though they will have to whistle for the insurance money."

August shook his head.

"Nothing seems to succeed for them. They had a grown-up son. He never came home from Lofoten. They have a half-grown youngster left and the rest are all girls."

August offered no comment. Yes, he had become a tiresome old man.

"Well well," said the doctor. "When your money arrives, we'll look you up under the name of Altmulig. Never fear, we'll look you up."

After the departure of the doctor, Fru Lund gave free play to her tongue. That gorgeous creature! Why, it almost seemed as though something were troubling her mind and that she was desirous of unburdening her soul to someone who would understand. The strain seemed to increase and her mouth began to tremble. August could not control his amazement. That Esther who had always seemed so clever and sensible, who had married herself a doctor, whom God had elevated to the status of "Fru"—see there, she had taken to tears!

It appeared that the cause of her outburst had been August, who in her mind was a symbol for Polden. "I am mindful to know," he had said. That had sounded so sweet to her ears, for such was the speech of her native village. And did he remember the song about the girl who had jumped in the sea? Oh, but he should remember, for there were others, too, who might like to do the same. . . .

"It's so nice to hear you using the words of our village, August, for I've not heard them for many a year. But you've forgotten everything, haven't you? Don't you remember Polden, August? That father and mother of mine, they're still alive. You remember them, don't you? My mother, she was that Ragna, you know—that Ragna! And Johanna, that sister of mine who went south with the pastor and his family? She's married now to a baker and they have a large bakery with many men. And that Roderik, my brother, the mail carrier? You had him to work for you when you were building that factory of yours, and you lent him the money to build him a house and all that. But you never mention any of them. But you can talk dialect, like I can, and I was so touched when those words came into your mouth. I had almost forgotten those spruce plants of yours, but then you said: 'I'm mindful to ask if those little spruce trees of mine are still living and growing.' That's just the way you said it, and *Herregud!* I could hardly keep back the tears. They were planted along the south side of the house and the whole house is so tiny, and mother she sits there on the doorstep, and at home there is only one window with such wee tiny panes, but everything so neat and clean. She wanted to give me that cape which Roderik had bought for just herself alone——" The doctor's wife sobbed aloud.

August sat there, scared out of his wits and gazing about uneasily.

"No, he has gone," Fru Esther says. "He has left me to myself. He was kind and left me to myself. . . ."

She continued to speak about Polden, mentioned the pretty little footpath leading down to the boathouses, mentioned the brook where the women used to wash their clothes—it was so pretty with its flat projecting stones on which one could go hopping along. . . . There sat the doctor's lady, but now she was that Esther once more, a romping youngster, hungry, barefoot and in rags, but happier than she had ever been since those days. Oh,

didn't he remember the song they all had used to sing? Ay, the girl, she had jumped in the sea! Surely he could believe her, for she knew every word of the song by heart.

The good lady was anything but fortunate in the matter of her audience. Were it homesickness which was burdening her soul and were it a word of comfort she was yearning for, she could not possibly have found a less sympathetic creature than August, who had never had a home in this world and who did not even have common sense enough to realize this lack of his life. He, a mere vagabond, a sterile knockabout, who had dragged his roots behind him from land to land, and who had never known a different mode of living! Never a father and mother, never a table at which he could sit as one of the family, never a grave to care for, never a hymn for his homeland booming with God's voice within his breast. Only a machine, constructed as an instrument of progress, of industry, of business, of mechanics, of money. A life, but not a soul. The happiest days of his youth had been squandered upon the sea to which he had long belonged. But Fru Lund was not a sailor and lacked all power to interest him.

She might have told herself that, in her present dilemma, this fellow had nothing to offer her, but she was easily contented and she continued to pour forth her soul to him. The mere fact that he had once been in Polden, had lived in a house in Polden, was enough for her; she leaned toward him because he was a friend from the dear days of her youth. "I am mindful to ask——" in those words lay the every-day speech of Polden, the very throb of Polden's heart.

She was not unaware of the fact that he was unable to see through to her plight, that he merely pitied her objectively, but she kept right on, none the less. "I've not been home once since I came here," she told him.

This amazed him far less than the other things she had mentioned but, even so, he managed to blurt out: "And

only a couple of days' journey north from here! That's funny!"

"Ay, that's the way it is with me here. Never been home! But what brought you here to Segelfoss?"

"Who, me?"

"As for me, I came here because my husband brought me here," she went on. "But I hate it here, everything about the place. Here there are too many grand people for me. I can't play the piano or do anything else. And if it weren't for the boys, I should certainly find myself running away."

"You don't mean that, do you?"

"Home to Polden, and stay there."

"For good?" he cried. "No, you want to get away! And to Polden?"

"I'm so sad here in Segelfoss. You can't understand it, but I'm just like a crow cast in with a flock of grand peacocks."

"No, no, no! So you'd like to get away! And you, the prettiest of them all. Well I never——"

"That isn't it," she said. "No, you'll never understand. It isn't a question of being a tiny bit pretty in the face—although I know now that that's the only reason he took me. No, it isn't that. And now I can't sleep nights again, and I can't get hold of any drops."

"Can't you get all the drops you like?"

"No. He refuses me."

"I can get drops for you," says August. "I'm well known down at the drugstore."

The lady shakes her head: "I don't dare take them any more. Once I did, but he found out about it. It isn't that he is cross when I ask him; he just says no, they're not good for me. You see, August, that's the way it goes when a man marries beneath him and I should never have allowed him to do it. That's the reason why he moved down here to Segelfoss—he didn't want my mother and father to visit us in our home, and there isn't much more I can

say about that. But that's what I mean when I tell you I'm a crow in with a flock of peacocks. That's why he scolds me and nags at me and worries himself sick. We get books from a book-club we belong to. But I'm no person for books and such-like. Oh, but my mother was a great one to read—she knew everything in books both inside and outside of school. But he comes to me with this or that book I'm to read. Ay, and I read it and I understand most of what's written in it, but when he asks me questions about it, I always find out that it was only the worst and the most unimportant parts I have carried away in my mind—not the real bone and marrow. And that's the way it goes in everything. Once he sat up in bed and before I knew what he was saying he ordered me to turn away from him. I leaned over to look him in the face.—'Turn over, do you hear!' he stormed.—'Why must I?' I asked.—'Well, if you must know, it's your breath!' he said and jumped right out of bed. But my teeth are good and I scrubbed my mouth, August, so it must have been simply his nasty temper which made him jump out of bed that way. And many times when he's been out playing cards of an evening, it's his own breath which smells something frightful, but I have never said anything to him about it, for he's always so proud of himself. Another time he said to me: 'Once a certain member of my family might have become a minister of state.'—'Hm,' I said, a tiny little bit angry. 'It wasn't perhaps you, was it?'—'Not I, unfortunately,' he said, 'for you see that's all over now that I've married you.'—'So you see it's best for me to go back where I came from,' I said. 'For thus maybe I can find some comfort and peace of mind for myself as well,' I said. 'And as for that, I was far better off in the days when I used to stand in the kitchen cooking your food for you, before I was married to you or anything else!' I threw this answer right in his teeth and I was bad friends with him for a whole day. But you know how it is, we both wanted to have things pleasant between us and

that night in bed he said to me as usual: 'How about it, Esther? You and me, you know!' "

"Well," said August, "if that isn't always the way it goes! If anyone had asked me, I'd have said there goes a perfect couple."

But the lady shook her head and said plaintively: "No, we're not. If it wasn't for the boys, I don't know what——"

August: "Two mighty fine lads! I don't know when I've seen two such stout little youngsters."

"Yes, and they must never know that their mother and father are bad friends. My husband says as much, too. And he is afraid that gossip might get about in town. But such can't always be avoided, you know. Our maid overhears an occasional word and her mind fills in the rest. Of course, she can't keep her mouth closed and thus it is bound to get out. I'm sure it has already. I know from a number of things. . . . There, he is coming back! I hear him——" The lady pauses a moment to listen. Then she hastens to utter these last few words: "You mustn't tell a soul what I have told you, August! And what I've told has not been in criticism of him, but simply to show you that I belong back in Polden, back home in the village where I was born. I'll never be a human being here. That's why you made me cry when you were talking—haha—curious, wasn't it? And no one else has ever got me to cry! Sheer nonsense on my part, of course——"

Thoughtfully, August strolled home to his room. He discussed the evening with himself, checked over and audited the events of the evening in his own mind. Oh, he was more than the mere dust of old age! Dear Esther, dear lady, the high and the low, the humble and the proud, each has his problem to face. And you have yours. No one can escape, we are all defending ourselves against something. But to sit an entire evening talking about Polden, bawling over Polden—what the devil is Polden

to us? Of course, of course! He had played on the accordion on more than one occasion and sung the words, as well. But the girl never jumped in the sea! That was all nonsense! No one jumped in the sea. She merely sat there and wrote a verse in which she thought she had jumped in the sea. God bless you, Esthermor, my little Esther, all she did was sit there on the beach and write a verse about jumping in the sea. After that she had marched straight home again. Ay, and as for you, my dear doctor, my splendid friend, who wanted me to sit there and tell those boys of yours stories about South America and Latvia, I simply couldn't allow myself to get back into the habit of exaggerating. . . .

No, August was far from the dust of old age; had he been merely that, he could not have checked over and audited the events of the evening. And was he acquainted with one of Tobias' daughters? Yes! Briefly, yes he was! But that was the affair of no one save himself. He had met her on the street, she had looked at him so humbly, she was very poor, and she had such pleading eyes. Why had she looked at him that way and why had he stopped to speak with her? She must have heard that Valborg of Øira had received a wonderful new dress from him, and it did not exactly go against August's grain to be recognized as a wealthy man one had heard about. A horse, you say? Ay, we'll find a way out of your difficulty!

Yes, as a matter of fact he had stood there on the street with a flood of sweet sympathy welling up within him, God forgive him his sin, if it was a sin! He had asked her where she lived and she had told him: the district folk called South Parish. "What name do they call you by?" he had asked. And she had told him: Cornelia. He had taken down her name, puffed out his chest and written it down with a pencil. August had known how it would be; back home, breathless, she would tell her people: "He took a book out of his pocket and wrote my name in it!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

LATER on in the summer it came about that Tobias got his insurance money after all. All who could had helped him. Tobias' wife had testified that he had positively not gasped in his sleep, that in fact he had screamed, uttered a little cry in his sleep, and this had turned the tide. Cleared of all personal blame for the fire, he already had neighbours and regular carpenters at work putting up a new house for him. Nor was the new building to be more in the way of a home than the old—there would be parlour, kitchen and two bedrooms just as there had been before and these were enough, these would serve all purposes. Few cottages, in fact, could boast of two bedrooms.

One of the bedrooms would be for the old people, the other for Cornelia and the children; thus it had been before, and thus it would be again. But if travelers and strangers were to stop in for a night's lodging, Cornelia and the children could easily give up their room and find corners of the parlour in which to rest their weary bones; thus it had been before, and thus it would be again. It might be wandering pedlars who would seek refuge over night, or it might be some preacher or evangelist, now and then a tourist, perhaps, or only some weary vagabond lacking means to stay at the hotel—to such could Tobias offer the shelter of his roof.

The first stranger to occupy the new bedroom was a traveling Anabaptist. He was a handsome, middle-aged man with the eyes of a fanatic and a Jesus-like beard. He was selling or giving away religious pamphlets and holding revival meetings in the cottages round about. After a week of furious activity, he had succeeded in stirring up

a tremendous amount of fear and religious fervour up and down the countryside. When no cottage could be found large enough to accommodate his meetings, he called upon Pastor Landsen and succeeded in obtaining the use of the school-house. He was carrying on a terrific campaign, people even came from town to attend his meetings and no one seemed to find it amiss to squander an hour or two on prayer.

It was a remarkable thing about that Anabaptist: his audiences seemed unable to detect any difference between his gospel and other statements of God's Word. Oh, but there was a deeper meaning to his work! After each sermon and appropriate prayers, he would conduct his following down to the river and, in its waters, baptize them. This was all in accordance with his earnest belief that it was the only thing to do—these people were black with sin and he would give them this opportunity to clean themselves up for the Lord. But they had been baptized before, had they not? To be sure, but in running water? Was a baptismal fount the same thing as the River Jordan? No no, my friends!

This preacher with those burning eyes of his had delved deeply into esoteric literature; he was a devil of a fellow to settle the doubts of his people and the regular pastor of Segelfoss received a rather good impression of the man. This priest of the parish, this Ole Landsen, he was anything but contentious in spirit, it was never his thought to find fault with others. The *Segelfoss News* had interviewed him and asked whether he did not consider these revival meetings in the school-house and these baptisms in the river to be getting folk off on the wrong track, to which the pastor had replied that this question had its juridical aspect. People who had interested themselves in the revival might otherwise have put their time to far worse use. And it might be shown that these religious exercises were actually of benefit to this one or that one, who

knew? "Those people are groping forward after the light exactly as we others are doing. We none of us know anything, we simply *believe*." Thus Pastor Ole Landsen had expressed himself.

And there they all went to meeting, children and womenfolk, mostly, but a few men, as well. A full house. And there in the midst of them sat Mons-Karina, chewing tobacco, spitting on the floor and rubbing it dry with her foot. Valborg from Øira attended, though she had perhaps dressed herself up a bit too grand in a new dress of fine green and red material. Cornelia of South Parish came with her mother and her younger sisters and her half-grown brother, Mattis. And after a time, in truth, came also Karel i Roten and his wife Gina and their little ones. And Karel had a gift for song and made the most of the hymns, but when Gina, with that glorious voice of hers would sing out, the others would all fall silent. Now and then a local Salvationist would join the gathering and now and then one of August's road-workers.

Full house and tears and a frenzy of emotion. Ay, and nothing to be done about it. It was only the district-doctor who had dared to murmur: "That ducking in the river is a wild idea. One can catch cold from such a baptism, one can develop pneumonia, cystirrhœa, rheumatism, bad hips, stiff fingers." Thus District-Doctor Lund had expressed himself. But none there was who would take a doctor's word where religion was concerned.

August is restless these days. He wanders about waiting for his money from Polden and is unable to interest himself in anything aside from his daily supervision of the road construction. As Gordon Tidemand's right-hand man it is not for him to mingle with the common herd, and on Sundays when he is idle, it is his custom to go for long walks in the country. He carries a staff to swing and talks to himself as he walks.

He wanders out to Tobias' new house. Cornelia is not at home, no one is home, the house is empty. The only sign of life is the horse, grazing a short distance away. He inspects the house from all angles. As a builder of houses himself during his younger days in Polden, he gazes at the present building with a keen professional eye. Nothing new to learn here, walls of skinned logs, moss to seal the cracks, a small porch, a turf roof. No panes of coloured glass in the door.

He strolls over to the horse, a gift from none save himself and which he is now seeing for the first time. Observing a woman approaching from the neighbouring farm, he draws himself up and goes stalking about the horse as though he were something of a connoisseur. He tries to lift up one of the animal's forefeet, but the horse simply lays back its ears and turns its back on him.

The woman draws near; it is Aase, tall and exotic in appearance, clad in her Lappish cloak and moccasins, a tall sugar-loaf cap on her head, a scarf about her neck and with a whole cluster of dingedangles hanging from her belt. August does not look up at her.

"Are you afraid of the horse?" asks Aase.

He casts a hurried glance in her direction without answering.

"I saw as you were afraid."

"I wasn't exactly afraid," August said. "I just wanted to look at his hoof."

"What ails the hoof?" she asked, and easily lifted up the horse's leg.

August was already beginning to feel a bit uneasy. "I just wanted—I thought he needed to be shod," he said.

"This is that Tobias' new mare, but 'tis little enough she is worth," Aase said. "Them as owned her before let her go because she kicks. Would you be wanting to see her other hoofs?"

"No. But what the devil does all this have to do with you?"

"Is it the horse or something else as has brought you out here?" Aase asked.

Such a woman! How much did she think he would stand for? "Say, you!" he cried. "Why don't you get back to your own kind and use that jaw of yours on them?"

Together they walked over to the house and August remarked that there was no one at home. Without heeding his remark, she stepped inside. When she came out again, she paused to spit on the doorstep. Ho! So that's the kind you are, eh! August mused and promptly crossed himself. He took fright and crossed himself again, twice—forehead and breast. Aase paid not the slightest attention to him; instead, she seated herself on the doorstep and deliberately filled her pipe.

"Here's an odd bit I've got," he said and held something in his hand to show her. "I was wondering how you'd like to have it?"

"An old coin? With a hook?"

"I soldered the hook on myself so the coin could be worn on a chain. Have you ever seen anything like that before?"

"I've many just like it already."

"But this one is sacred," said August. "It's been sprinkled with holy water in Russia. I was wondering if you'd like to have it?"

She hooked it onto the chain which held her other gew-gaws and looked approvingly at it. With that, she must have decided to make some return for the favour. With a quick gesture, she turned her cap inside-out and put it back on her head with the lining on the outside. "Let me see that hand of yours," she said. "No, not that one. The one as you gave me this with!" She inspected the hand, back and palm, lifted it up three times and nodded.

"Friday child," she said. "Rubbish fit for nothing!" He withdrew his hand and crossed himself with it. Both of them were very much in earnest.

When she rose and started off, he called after her. "Hey, don't you know you've got your hat on wrong side out?"

"Ay—seven paces!" she said cryptically and halted. With that, she adjusted her hat properly and left him altogether. . . .

It was getting on toward meal time and he strolled homeward, swinging his staff and talking to himself. He might have asked her what she had seen in his hand, he might have learned a few things about his fate, how things would be for him after his money arrived, for instance. Nonsense—she didn't know any more about it than he did himself! But she had spat upon leaving the house.

He fell in with a few of those who had been down at the river getting themselves baptised. One of the small dealers from town who had been at the card table in August's room gave an amusing account of the hallowed event: Mons-Karina, it seemed, had stepped into the water with a wad of tobacco in her mouth and she couldn't find a place to spit—hahaha—she couldn't spit in the holy water! It had looked as though they would have to get rid of her, without bothering to baptise her. But the revivalist had suddenly got a brilliant idea—he had taken her downstream away from the rest and ducked her there. Haha, how funny it had been!

"Are you coming to play cards this afternoon?" asked August.

"No," said the merchant.

"No?"

"I wouldn't touch my hand to a card this day."

"All right, do what you want!" August muttered with exasperation.

But August had yet to obtain the information he was

seeking, and some time passed before he got up sufficient courage to come out with a direct query. "Was anyone from Tobias' place baptised?" he asked.

"From Tobias' place? No."

"I thought maybe there would be, seeing as the preacher is staying over there. A certain Gypsy woman spit on the doorstep of that new house of his today, so I was thinking that it might be just as well for Tobias to get himself baptised."

"Hm, it must have been that Aase, then—that witch! All she does is go about spitting misfortune upon folks' houses."

"Wasn't that Cornelia baptised either?" August asked.

"No—no, there were only four of us today."

August stopped dead in his tracks and shouted: "What! You, too?"

The merchant also stopped and nodded: "Ay, so it would seem," he said.

"Well, I'll be—what the devil did you do that for?"

"What does anybody get baptised for? You talk like a fool!"

August turned on him scornfully: "You're a pig in holy matters! Weren't you baptised already in the name of the Trinity? Hm, this is the worst thing I've ever heard!"

The man attempted to excuse himself: "Things weren't going so good for me, let me tell you. Both Karel i Roten and that wife of his got themselves baptised, and you see Karel occasionally does a bit of business with me."

August shook his head: "You're just like a lot of swine, the whole pack of you, all filled up with superstition and false idol worship. And what's that damned old angel-maker doing, staying out there with an innocent girl in the house? I'd stand in my right, if I went and reported him to that chief of mine."

"Save your steps," said the man. "The preacher is all

ready to leave town now. I was the last one he baptised, at least for the present——”

So that was the end of the card game for that evening; the merchant had got himself baptised and was using this for an excuse and the gardener Steffen had gone off somewhere with his sweetheart. Not even the Gypsy Alexander was anywhere to be found.

Nothing else to do but eat, take a nap after dinner, go out for another walk and wait on pins and needles for that money of his to arrive. Why the devil didn't it come? What was the matter? Well, it was a good thing, in any event, that that preacher fellow was on his way.

During the latter part of the afternoon he found himself down by the pier where two small boys were throwing stones at the sloop *Soria*. Suddenly he heard a stone strike home with a splinter of glass. Nimble lads they were, but they were unable to get away before August had recognized them—they were the doctor's two sons, two little hellcats, two little rascals when it came to getting into mischief. It is possible that there was someone down in the cabin—a couple the lads had hoped to disturb.

There would be an evening of cards, after all. Jørn Mathildesen turned up and got his usual *krone* for acting as sentry. The merchant had changed his mind and appeared.

“What are you doing here?” August asked.

“Didn't you say something about a hand or two of cards?” the man returned.

“I thought you got yourself baptised today! Didn't I tell you that you were a pig about sacred matters?”

“Ay, but we can't all be Jesus, you know.”

The gardener Steffen cut short his playing the swain and came racing over to August's room as though frightened stiff he might miss something and with him he

brought one of the clerks from the store, a regular demon at cards. Only the Gypsy was absent.

This was the first time the store-clerk had met with the sacred circle, but he lost no time in going after what small change the others had in their pockets. "Never saw anything to beat it!" said the merchant and lost again. But August was in even tighter straits than he; he was obliged to break the last banknote he had to his name. This was his present remnant, and what is there to do with a remnant? Reckless, excited, he stayed in the game.

The party lasted until midnight, Steffen and the store-clerk winning consistently. After they had cleaned out the other pair, there was nothing further to detain them and they rose and picked up their hats. They whistled, cast taunts at the losers and were in the highest of spirits when they left.

The merchant was furious at the whole group, at the entire world and demanded if August wouldn't be good enough to cross himself a few times! Oh, he was in a vile humour, ashen with rage, desperate.

"Don't cry about it!" said August and laughed at him.

"I should have listened to my wife and stayed away from here," the man wailed. "Here I sit now as naked as when I was inside my mother's womb."

"You've got your wedding ring on!" said August.

"What's that!" screamed the man.

"Let's play for that."

"Who ever heard such sinful talk! You haven't got a single øre left to set up against it."

"I'll play you my Bible against it," said August.

"Your Bible!" said the man, pausing to take a long breath. "You'd be committing a sin to play for that."

August began shuffling the cards and said: "Best three out of five hands."

The merchant won the first hand.

August took down the Bible from the shelf and laid it on the table. What did he want with it, heavy as it had been to drag about with him from country to country? An old Russian Bible. "Lay down the ring!" he said.

With much effort the man got the ring from his finger and laid it on top of the Bible.

August won. They were even. He also won the next hand.

The merchant was trembling by now, but he took fresh hope when he evened the game by winning the fourth hand. The score was two-all. The next hand would tell the story.

August prepared to deal.

"Shuffle the cards!" said the man.

August refused.

With that the merchant let one card slip to the floor and began counting over the cards he held in his hand. "I've only got four cards," he said. "New deal!"

"Why?" asked August. "There's one of your cards on the floor."

"Yes, but you saw what it was. New deal!"

August good-naturedly threw in his hand and said: "All right, deal them over, you rascal!"

He lost. Naturally he lost with the wretched cards he received in the next hand. Very well, that old Bible had been so heavy to drag about with him from country to country. The merchant let out an audible sigh of relief, returned his wedding ring to his finger, stuck the Bible under his arm and withdrew. . . .

So there had been an evening of cards, after all.

Gammelmoderen called at August's room before he had crawled into bed. Flushed in the face she was, youthful in appearance, charming. "Altmulig," she said, "I saw you down by the pier this evening. Someone was throwing stones out at the sloop."

"Hm," said August to keep from stepping into something.

"Yes. I had just gone aboard to look around, but then they began throwing those stones so there was nothing else for me to do. Will you set some new panes in the skylight early tomorrow morning?"

"Ay, ay, ma'am!"

"Early, before you go to work on the road?"

"Ay, ay."

"Thanks, Altmulig. You're always so nice to come to!" Gammelmoderen said and slipped out the door.

It was one o'clock.

The Gypsy stopped in before going to bed. He was as drunk as could be, but he was holding it well. He gave out that he had been up in the mountains hunting for angelica root all day Sunday.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AUGUST was up at six o'clock the next morning. He realized what it meant to Gammelmoderen to have the skylight repaired before Gordon Tidemand should be up and around.

He would be unable to obtain glass and putty before the opening of the store with the arrival of the clerks at eight o'clock, but he could row aboard the sloop and look round, scrape out the old putty and otherwise get things ready.

On the wharf he stumbles across Adolf, the road-worker. August is surprised by the meeting, but Adolf greets him with a "Good morning," and looks his boss straight in the eyes. He conceals nothing.

"What—is that you there, Adolf?"

"Yes, but I was just going back home."

"What are you doing here?"

"Nothing. I just took a walk down here."

"Why aren't you in bed?"

"I slept all day yesterday. The whole gang of us slept through."

"I understand you've had a falling-out with that bunky of yours," August said.

"No—Yes, he's got such a filthy mouth."

"You shouldn't let that bother you. You know what kind of a fellow that Francis is."

"Yes."

"Well, it's a good thing I ran into you. Your gang is to begin on that new cut. And some of the curbing is set in crooked. See that it is set in straight. I won't be up for a time, I've work to do down here."

Adolf nods to this and remarks: "No, I shouldn't let it

bother me. But he keeps it up night and day. It's terrible to listen to."

"Nonsense! What is it he says?"

Adolf does not answer this question; he goes straight on to explain: "Ever since she bound up my finger the time it got hurt."

August had heard of the occurrence: Marna, the chief's sister, had been on the spot when Adolf had bruised his finger. She had torn a strip from her handkerchief and tied it about the finger. That had been all. Well, no doubt Frøken Marna would have done as much for anyone else, but Adolf was young and good-looking and she had probably taken a bit of a fancy to him. What of it? There was nothing wrong in that. But much had been made of the affair and Adolf, a sensitive lad, had been driven out of the bunk-house, out of his bed where he slept, by the vulgar taunts of his comrades.

"I was wondering if you'd say something to him," said Adolf.

"Rubbish! What does he say that's so bad?"

"He makes indecent remarks."

"Go on home and get an hour's sleep," said August.

He rowed aboard the sloop, scraped the dry putty from the damaged skylight, swept up after himself, set a few things to rights, coiled up a rope and hung it up where it belonged—this old sailor man, he felt at home aboard ship. All morning his mind was busy with petty reminiscences; he had a deck beneath his feet again, he was happy, he gazed up at the rigging, and from old habit cast an eye at the weather. The tramp of his feet on the deck echoed hollowly through the empty hold of the vessel. That good skipper Olsen, he ought to have swabbed down his craft, he ought—she appeared none too spic and span after her recent cargo of herring. But no, Skipper Olsen was never about; he lived ashore, he owned a little farm which occupied his entire attention.

August stepped down into the cuddy and picked up a few glass beads from the floor. Those little devils of the doctor's had scattered glass beads all over the cabin, on the table, over in the bunk—why, he even had to shake out the blankets. Along with the beads, a hairpin or two fell to the floor, a lady's belt and another strange-looking object—a snow-white bit of elastic, such as a lady might wear to hold up her stockings. Someone must have quit the place in haste, August mused—had skipped out and forgotten to take this stuff along! He makes a small bundle of intimate articles, steps up on deck and heaves it into the sea.

Finished with his chores, he hastened up the road in the direction of the store. But he had spent too much time on board; there came Gordon Tidemand driving down the road! A most unfortunate meeting, for the chief made a point to halt him.

Oh but there was no danger, the chief was as cordial as ever.

"There was something I wanted to ask you, Altmulig. You're sure you're making the road wide enough?"

"Wide enough? Ay, you've no cause for worry there."

"But you see, I'm buying an automobile. Will the road be wide enough for that?"

"How big of a car will it be?"

"A regular touring-car. A five-seater."

August reached instinctively for his measuring tape, but without unwinding it, he began to reckon things out in his head: 180, extra for fenders 50. "Plenty of room!" he decided.

"Thanks, that's just what I wanted to know," said the chief, and drove on.

A devil of a fellow, that Altmulig! A good kind to have around, Gordon Tidemand thought to himself; a person who knows what's what both at sea and ashore!

Gordon Tidemand was abroad somewhat earlier than

usual—not that he was downright worried over anything, though he was, to be sure, concerned about a certain matter, a grand plan he had been working out in his mind—a consulate at Segelfoss, the first to be set up in town, perhaps the only one—a British consulate! He had been secretly arranging the details and had secured the backing of a number of persons of influence; among these several he had known in England had been actively interested. He was not in doubt as to the outcome, but he had been unable to control his impatience of late and he could hardly wait to get down to his office to see what the mail might bring. There were no obstacles to hold up his plan, he had no competitors in the field, the need was apparent, but there was an endless amount of red tape to be gone through in all the various offices. And that meant waiting on pins and needles.

He enters by his own private door he had had put in for him in order that he might avoid walking through the public part of the store. The shades are already rolled up, his mail is laid out on the desk. Without taking time to remove more than his right glove, he pounces upon his mail.

Ah—the letter!

He slits it open with a paper-knife. He is still methodical enough to do this at least, but his hands are trembling and his brown eyes are like gleaming gimlets.

Ah—the official document!

Phew! He reads it over, finds no mistake with it, glances at the date and studies the scrawling signatures. He throws off his top coat, claws off his other glove, climbs onto his high swivel-stool and goes over the papers once more from beginning to end. He is absorbed in this for some time and wastes no glance on the regular mail before him.

He begins pacing the floor. The people out in the store realize that some important matter is at hand. There can

be no mistake about that. He considers the effect of his appointment; he had been not a day too early in ordering that automobile and he would speak to Altmulig at once about making the stall and carriage shed over into a garage. He would have to see about getting a British flag, he would have to arrange for a uniform. Wouldn't this likewise mean an increase of trade for his business? Perhaps he ought to put on another salesman to represent him from Helgeland to Trondhjem. The name of his house would carry a special appeal—"Representing Consul Gordon Tidemand, Segelfoss—"

He rings for his head-clerk, nods to the latter's greeting and says: "I've noticed a number of hideous signs and posters in the neighbourhood of my office door—see that they are removed!"

"Yes, sir."

"All those margarine advertisements."

"Yes, sir."

"And all those tobacco posters. And those placards advertising canned goods. Away with the whole business!"

"Yes, sir."

"Thank you, there was nothing more."

Yes, it would have been a pretty sight indeed to have had the British consular escutcheon hanging there in the midst of all those screaming portraits of sardine tins!

He cast a hurried glance over the regular mail, cut open a few envelopes—bills and customs clearance papers. A local letter is naturally a begging letter; he receives many of these, for the most part from the surrounding parish—a magnate such as himself could not very well avoid such correspondence.

He slits open one of these begging letters. A sheet of water-ruled paper, awkward hand-writing, possibly somewhat cramped by design, but the contents comprehensible for all that: he should not neglect to keep an eye on certain persons and on the sloop *Soria*. As, for example,

last night, when there were feastings and other abominations going on in the cabin until well past the hour of midnight—an event which was but one in a long series of similar events. There was an old saying: "From the devil race, and Gypsies chase." There was one Gypsy she was chasing all right, but not in the way that was meant. "Am writing this as one who has long been your friend, but if it is true that you have his Gypsy eyes, then it is my advice that you chase him off the place at once according to the old saying as it was meant and let all the old talk be buried in the past. Sincerely yours, an Admirer."

He neither screamed nor ground his teeth, he simply crumpled up the letter and thrust it in the stove. This was best. Gordon Tidemand was not wholly unfamiliar with the scandal about his mother; whilst growing up he had many times heard dark hints as to his paternity, though no one had ever had the effrontery to come out with it once the young master had attained his full manhood. The present letter was of no importance, it wasn't signed by anyone, it was nothing for a consul to bother his head about one way or the other.

Suddenly remembering that it was summer and that there was no fire in the stove, he walked over and threw in a lighted match. The letter along with much other accumulated rubbish immediately burst into flame. Yes, this was best.

He worked for a time on his books, arranged his correspondence, copied down a few figures, but was too deeply concerned with the great news the morning had brought him to be truly diligent. Tomorrow would also be a day; today he would make an exception and leave his office early. It would be a pleasure for Juliet and his mother and sister to learn the news. He rang and gave orders for the horse to be put back in the harness.

Leaving his office, he observed the head-clerk aloft on a

step-ladder; the latter was removing the advertising posters from the vicinity of the chief's private door. Seldom did it happen that the chief would utter a superfluous word to his people, but on this occasion he nodded to his head-clerk and said: "Ah, that's better!"

Speechless were those at home, dumbfounded when he laid the documents on the table before them. Who had ever seen such a boy! If he hadn't gone and snatched himself a consular appointment without so much as breathing a word to a soul! And British consul, to boot! We've suddenly become wife and mother and sister to an eminent man! Come here, children and creeping infants, come here and look at that father of yours!

"Yes," he said. "But just wait until I get my uniform on!"

"Why, Lord bless my soul!"

They suddenly decided that there should be salmon for lunch, that there should also be a glass or two of wine, perhaps even a drop of liqueur to sip with the coffee. "That's the very least we can do to honour you!" they told him.

Over and over again at table they discussed the details of his triumph. What would be his duties? To represent the British Empire at Segelfoss, to look out for shipwrecked English sailors cast ashore by the waves of the Atlantic. "You may have a first mate to dance with yet, Marna!"

"Hahaha!" laughed Marna.

"But will you get anything for it?" asked his mother, that shrewd, that practical widow of Theodore paa Bua.

"Nothing save the honour," he replied somewhat curtly. But, glancing over at his mother, he bit his tongue. She was so beautiful, so intelligent, that mother of his; she wished him nought but well and she was the youngest one of them all. "But it may prove indirectly of material benefit to me," he added. "I am planning to increase my clien-

tele. I might take on another traveler to represent me south of here. That might not prove entirely out of the way, what do you think? Skoal, little mother!"

"I'm going to sit right down and write to Lillian," said Marna, "and tease her a little because *her* husband is not a consul!"

"She may come back at you," said her brother, "and ask you what kind of a husband *you* have, for example!"

Marna struck at him with her napkin and told him to keep still.

"What's that? You have the nerve to tell a consul to keep still?"

"Hahaha!"

"Skoal, Juliet!" he said raising his glass. "I wish, though, that I might rather have made you a countess!"

"I haven't a thing to offer you in return," said Fru Juliet, her eyes brimming with tears. Oh that charming Juliet, she was so far along she was touched by the slightest thing. He was often obliged to comfort her.

He replied: "Yes, Juliet, you have given me far more in this world than ever I have deserved. And you keep on giving and giving. You have no equal in giving. Smile, Juliet, you have good reason to, you know!"

And all at the table drank to her.

While they were at their coffee, the phone rang and Gammelmoderen rose to answer it. She returned immediately and said: "It was the *Segelfoss News* wanting to know whether it was true that Gordon Tidemand has been made consul."

They clapped their hands and cried: "What's that? Well, I declare!"

"Yes, the morning papers in Oslo had it, and Davidsen has just received a telegram."

"Well, I never! And what did you say in reply?"

"I said that it was true!" beamed Gammelmoderen.

Silence.

"Yes, what else could you say!"

During the course of the afternoon many called up to offer their congratulations. The chief telegraphist who had certainly been the first in Segelfoss to learn of the appointment was careful to say: "I was passing the *News* office and saw a bulletin announcing the event!" The district judge called up, the doctor called up, and there were many more besides. It was a grand day. The telephone wasn't silent for a moment.

Druggist Holm called up and asked for Frøken Marna; through her he congratulated the household. Just another of his sudden impulses. Later he remarked: "I did not wish to disturb the Master personally. But you, Frøken Marna, you are young and beautiful enough to forgive me."

She started. Frøken Marna, he had called her, though she had hardly more than met the man! "I shall give them your greetings," she said.

"Thanks! That is all I dare implore you to do—for the present."

He was a madcap.

CHAPTER NINE

THERE were two sides to his nature, however, many sides, but he was also a madcap. Happy-go-lucky and reckless, somewhat careless in the matter of dress—one wide and one narrow shoestring, a hat which had seen better days. But essentially good-natured and of strong character, a well-spring of whimsical notions, occasionally even regretful over the mistakes he had made.

Aside from being adroit at swinging on a trapeze and rowing a boat, he was also something of a mountain-climber and in none of his activities did he think to spare a muscle. He had likewise a habit of going for long walks in the country, whether this was due to sheer boredom or a thirst for physical exercise, and indeed he was on friendly terms with natives of the rural districts who interested him with all the things they had to tell. There was, for example, the case of the man who, this very spring, had got drowned when the horse he was driving had backed both him and itself into the river below the falls. Both man and horse had been lost. But what had he been doing so near the falls with such a skittish colt? No one seems clever at guessing the riddle and the sheriff says it is a thousand times impossible ever to solve the mystery. "But here now's what I think——" offers the man who tells him the story. "If he had been using a sledge—but a cart it was he was driving, so that when he was trying to turn on that steep slope there, his wheels, they must have slipped back and pulled the horse down with the cart. Ay, that's how she seems to me. But much there is as is kept from the light of day in this and they say as that Aase had just been spitting on that doorstep of

his. And now 'tis as that Aase should be brought before the law to tell the things as she knows, but the sheriff, he won't so much as touch a hand to her, so there's nothing as can be done about anything. And his family as lives on behind him—his woman and four little ones—so boundless poor they are as nobody here would think, their man and support all dead and gone and even their horse was drowned. And the two oldest out begging in one part and the mother and the two littlest out begging in another! It might be as there's something the Herr Druggist might find to do for them?"

"Of course, of course," says Holm. "If only I—no, the idea is mad!"

"If only as to speak a word for them somewhere?"

"What was the man's name?"

"Ay, there you see, 'tis almost a blasphemy to take in one's mouth!"

"How so?"

"For 'tis no human name to be called by with such!"

"Well, what was his name?"

"Don't tell that I say it—'twas Solmund!"

He would certainly have liked to do something for the surviving members of Solmund's family, but what means did a mere druggist in Segelfoss have at his command! He could go for long walks and meet people and listen to their tales and return home. But what was he, really? A nonentity. He could sit and play patience, he could sit and read books—

Yes, but he could also play the guitar—oh, he was something of a master when it came to playing the guitar. The postmaster's wife, Fru Hagen, who understood music, said she had never heard such guitar-playing in her life. He sang a bit, as well, in a quiet, subdued, almost shameful voice, but there, too, he showed that he was really a musician. Nor was Fru Hagen able to sing much herself, now that she had lost her voice. But this did not prevent them from having many a pleasant time together

over their music, she on her grand piano: Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven—he on his guitar: light songs and ballads. Yes, art and music all the way through, even on a poor guitar.

It was his habit to get himself mildly drunk; he said he would never have the courage to play for the post-master's lady unless he were in such a condition as would warrant her forgiveness. There was a touch of bravado in his attitude, possibly a conscious modesty, an attempt to emphasize the fact that he was no bourgeois. He enjoyed himself in Fru Hagen's company; she had lived much among artists abroad and had a good bit in common with him. Together they would play and laugh and chat. No, he was not always drunk, nor in truth so very often, and were he to come to her on rare occasions after a bit of a bout with his fellow-Bergenser, Vendt of the hotel, he would be no less amusing and voluble than usual. To the contrary. Nor would Fru Hagen be any the less herself, either; she knew how to keep pace with him, that handsome little lady, graceful as a willow bough. They could hold the most incredible conversations together, many times actually verging on the point of subtle flirtation, and God knew if on some occasion they might not play with fire a bit too carelessly and cause a conflagration.

"Do you know, it is quite possible that I love you," he says. "But I don't suppose that you would care to close your door to me on that account?"

"Such would never enter my mind," she replies.

"No, for I am such a nonentity. And my outward appearance, I don't suppose that is much of a temptation to you, is it?"

"Oh, no, I consider my husband better looking."

"Here, here! That won't go," says Holm, shaking his head.

"He is fond of me."

"Well, so am I. And, do you know, I've just taken a notion to part my hair in the back."

"Heavens no! I'd rather have you just as you are."

"Hm."

"For you aren't exactly homely, you know."

"Homely? Why, I'd be downright handsome if only I didn't have this ugly nose in the middle of my face."

"It really isn't ugly," says Fru Hagen. "I consider it quite full and lovely."

"Hm. But do you know what I'm thinking as I sit here? That we could easily hear your husband coming up the front steps."

"Yes?"

"Yes. And that I should have plenty of time to kiss you before he gets home."

"No," says Fru Hagen, shaking her head.

"I don't see how you can very well avoid it," he mumbles.

"What would I say if he should suddenly come in on us?"

"You could say that you were sitting here reading a book."

"Hahaha! I never heard anything quite so brazen!"

"I might steal a kiss, you know. As though I knew it were forbidden."

"Better let it go altogether. You see, I'm a married woman."

"I don't believe it. You are a young and fascinating girl, and I have developed a tremendous passion for you."

"It is difficult to discern any signs of that passion in you," says the lady. "Especially, when I know very well that it doesn't exist."

"What, after all I have said!"

"Said? You haven't said anything."

"Are you mad? Of course, I didn't exactly say in so many words that I would die upon your grave. But such you must assume for yourself."

"Shall we play a bit again?" she asks.

"Out of the question! For now I am about to take you in my arms!" says Holm, rising.

But Fru Hagen avoids his embrace, gently—as it were, winningly—and steps across the room to the window where she stands in full view of the street. "Come here and see something!" she says.

The annual German musicians have arrived on the north-bound steamer and have stepped ashore at Segelfoss to play their serenades. And they will survive, as they have in the past survived; they will be received with friendship and a bit to eat in every house, so welcome they will be. But first of all, they make their way out to Segelfoss Manor where they form in a circle by the kitchen door and run through their entire repertory. Their visit is not in vain; with the first blast from the cornet, the inmates rush to the windows, the children flatten their noses against the panes and even the beautiful Frøken Marna raises a window and seats herself on the ledge to take full advantage of the concert. But Fru Juliet, she is on the verge of tears and refrains from showing herself, in such wise does she react to the serenade—that adorable mistress of Segelfoss, good heavens, see how easily touched she is! But down in the kitchen the maids glide in waltz-time each trip they take between cook-stove and sink, and as for Gammelmoderen, she too sways a bit to the music, though she has a young child in her arms.

And when the concert draws to a close, the eldest of the children, a little boy, steps out with an envelope containing money. Ah, banknotes! They are not niggardly at Segelfoss Manor. If only Gordon Tidemand himself had been at home, he would have rounded off the gift, added to it, added much. He would have shown the sort of man he was.

The musicians take off their hats and bow, first to the boy, to this little gentleman, and then to all the windows, both upstairs and downstairs. The young dark-haired

cornetist even kisses his fingers to the beautiful Marna aloft in her window, though she hardly so much as returns him a smile, that phlegmatic creature! It would take a virile lover indeed to kindle a flame in that lady's breast!

With that, the musicians wander down into town and station themselves outside the postmaster's home for their next performance. Here they are accustomed to exchanging a few words of German with the lady of the house and to receive a few *kroner* done up in a paper and thrown down into the band-leader's cap.

A procession of children and young people have followed them down the street, for here is a grand experience in their lives—a cornet, two violins and an accordion, music played by four men all at once, to them a living fairy tale. . . .

The band strikes up. And in the window stand the postmaster's wife, Fru Hagen, and Druggist Holm, listening.

"Have you a *krone*?" she asks. "For I have only one."

"I have two," he replies.

She opens the window, hats fly off, smiles and recognition.—"*Guten Tag, meine Herren!*"—"Guten Tag, gnädige Frau!"—"You're late this year!"—"Ja, gnädige Frau, a whole month later than usual. Ve vere delayed back home in Chairmany. But ve vill hurry along later now so ve come to Hammerfest before *die Hundstage*."

Fru Hagen takes aim at the cornetist's cap, and even though she is near-sighted, she throws the money. It finds its mark, how could it miss? For the young man is so flattered at being chosen by her, that he almost falls on his face in his efforts to catch her packet. The entire band laughs and the lady in the window laughs, too. "*Danke schön, gnädige Frau! Vielen Dank!*" And then the devil must have let loose inside that young cornetist's breast, for he steps directly up to the window, looks the lady straight in the face and kisses his fingers to her. The two are in such close proximity, that it might just as well have

been a kiss on the mouth. "*Glückliche Reise nordwärts!*" says the lady, stepping back from the window to hide the shameful blush on her cheeks.

"Mercy me!" is all she says.

But Druggist Holm has found something else to interest him and utters no reply. He has caught sight of a little boy and a little girl who, hand-in-hand, are standing outside the circle of town children. They feel lost in a town of this size, and for safety's sake, they cling to each other's hands. Both are carrying little pasteboard boxes under their arms, as they stand there watching the musicians, their mouths agape, all eyes.

Holm says to Fru Hagen with a deep bow: "Madam, I must leave you, I have completely forgotten that I must go on duty, though it breaks my heart."

"Dear, dear, so you must go!" she replies. How clever she is never to allow herself to be amazed over the sudden whims of this man!

"Thanks for today, madam! It breaks my heart."

He hastens out of the house and gathers up the two children as they stand there clinging tightly together. "What's your father's name?" he asks of the boy. A foolish question; the lad simply stares at him.

"Are you from North Parish?"

"What did you say?"

"I said, are you from North Parish?"

"Ay."

"You probably don't know. What's your father's name?"

"Father, he's dead," says the boy.

"Drowned below the falls?"

"Ay," answer both children at once.

"Come, you must have something to eat!" says Holm.

God knows what he could have had at home good enough for these little shavers, seeing as they needed so much. And it was probable, too, that they were expected

to take something home in those pasteboard boxes of theirs.

He takes them straight to the hotel.

A lovely predicament in which Druggist Holm now found himself! His last words to the children that day had been: "Come back tomorrow!" Yes, for they had given him those tiny sorrowful hands of theirs whilst thanking him for his food, and in his, they had seemed like little bird feet, and he had been quite overcome with emotion.

And yes, bright and early the following day the children had returned to the hotel, and thereafter they had come each day. This was splendid, a pleasure Holm would hardly have cared to deny himself. But now their mother had also joined the company and with her she had brought the two youngest, and that made five in all—it was now almost as though he had got himself a family! To be sure, the mother had come on a legitimate enough errand, to thank the druggist, but could he have allowed her and those two tiny tots to go away without a little something to chew on themselves? Who could be so hard-hearted? And on the following day, at meal-time, the mother had returned to the hotel—she had lost her kerchief, she said, and imagined she might have left it at the hotel. Oh well, it wasn't so easy to have four little ones! The mother came right frequently, and Holm could not send her away. The hotel-keeper asked him if it was his thought to marry the widow.

At length he was obliged to go to the welfare agency just as though he had once had this family and was now unable any longer to support them. This helped, as thenceforth the widow received definite support—nothing grand, to be sure, the painful bare necessities—but she received her grocery orders regularly and her children were no longer beggars.

"Phew!" said Druggist Holm.

And meanwhile the town had been ringing with music. The band-leader was like an old friend, recognized by folk from year to year; he played outside the hotel, he played outside the drugstore, packed up his band and led them out to the magistrate's home and the parsonage where they played, and on the way back to town, they stopped to play for the doctor—joyfully received wherever they went. Doctor Lund himself had stood with his arms around his wife's waist on the porch to listen, and fortunately the small boys were at home instead of being away on some errand of mischief. They went into the house after the coins they had themselves been saving, they collected money from their parents and from the girls in the kitchen, gathered in quite a sum and presented this to the band. The leader thanked them profusely. A tray of food and drink was brought out to them and after that there was more music and at length farewells were said. A charming farewell, not too lengthy and not too curt, a cultured farewell as in years past. But there, suddenly the cornetist was off again. The rascal, he had an eye for beauty, good-looking as he himself was with his burning gaze and his shining dark hair. But how ever had he found courage for this latest gesture of his! He raced up two of the three steps to the porch, knelt on the third and kissed the hem of Fru Esther's garment! That mad buffoon! His act constituted a serious breach of discipline, the third and worst he had committed that day, and the leader called out sharply to him. Nevertheless, he did not come until he was ready. At first the doctor's wife had not realized what was happening but then her lovely face had gone red as fire and she had uttered a laugh of embarrassment.

"*Auf Wiedersehen!*" the doctor called after the band and he, too, laughed, though his laughter was possibly a bit forced.

"That crazy fellow!" said his wife. "He wasn't with them past years."

"But perhaps he will come back again!" said the doctor.

His wife looked at him. "I didn't have anything to do with it," she said, and entered the house.

The doctor followed her in. "You didn't have anything to do with what? Do you think I care about that? Are you mad!"

"No, no, everything's all right."

"Don't flatter yourself, my dear Esther!"

Without another word, she left the room, mounted the stairs and continued on up to the attic. There she had a certain dark corner into which she could creep and hide, a heavenly corner which was all her own. Poor little Esther from Polden, in no wise grand enough to be a doctor's wife. No, it had been easier to be this doctor's cook.

The devil take that cornet-player! If he hadn't come all the way north from Germany just to set folk's heads awhirl in this backwoods town of Segelfoss in Norway! From the sound of the leader's voice, too, it was apparent that even he was strongly resentful of the young man's conduct and had the latter not been the most invaluable member of the quartette, he would certainly have let him go. But the cornet, my dear, that marvelous shining horn which brought in whole capfuls of money! Yes, it was the cornet which created the wildest sensation and it must have been a gift from God Himself to enable anyone to produce living tones from it. The doctor's sons who had accompanied the band, received permission to try the horn, but they were unable to get a single sound out of it. They became annoyed and tried it again, but not a peep would it give forth. "Oh the devil!" they cried and almost burst blood-vessels trying to get it to speak. The cornet seemed to smile at them, for all that it politely declined. Then one of them placed a finger on one of the valves—the instrument emitted a squeak. Ah, they had discovered the secret! They were probably the worst-behaved boys in town, but they were certainly no fools!

By the following day the musicians were finished in Segelfoss. There had been no great changes in the town since the year before; a couple of new craftsmen, a butcher and a watch-maker had arrived to try for a living in this new field, but these were not the type to squander one's musical gifts upon. The band was thus delighted to learn that a north-bound freighter, leaving that night, could take them aboard and drop them at the next populous port of call.

The doctor's boys, though it was past midnight, stole out of the house and followed the band aboard. And the *Segelfoss News* carried a friendly notice of the visiting German musicians. They came each year like migratory birds, stopped off at our little town and brought us all joy again, leaving behind them the nostalgic memory of a pleasure which had spread through all the homes, but which had been all too short. *Auf Wiedersehen!* Welcome back next year!

CHAPTER TEN

ODD that Segelfoss does not flourish, that business does not develop here with people earning money hand over fist, and traffic bustling in the streets. Just look at Gordon Tidemand, the Consul! *He* is up and doing, he has many irons in the fire.

There he is in the bank exchanging a few words with Lawyer-Banker Pettersen—the “Buttonhead.”

“My account is over-drawn—hm—a small amount, really less than one might expect, merely a few *kroner*. However, it is necessary for me to have cash to my credit.”

Yes, “Buttonhead” will care for his needs with pleasure, with extreme pleasure, in fact. For “Buttonhead” knows that the Consul would still have his ground rents even were all else to fail. Furthermore, his holdings here in the parish represent a whole fortune in themselves, a fortune “Buttonhead” would be only too glad to take over, if necessary.

“All right, then make it for—let’s say ten thousand. I’ve many workers on my pay-roll and I’m expecting a motor car.”

“Buttonhead” makes a note of the figure, 10,000.

So much for that.

The next person to be interviewed was Altmulig. Ah, there was one throbbing with life and activity! Altmulig was hard at work laying a cement floor in the garage which was to house the new car; haste for this had been so necessary, that he had been compelled to discontinue his supervision of the road-building work and to leave this in charge of Adolf. The automobile, it seems, had been telegraphed for and might already be on its way

north. Wasn't that sufficient reason for haste! But wasn't there likewise reason for haste in completing the very road along which the machine would roll when the Consul and his family were sojourning "out in the country?"—Altmulig is hard-pressed. He hasn't a moment to devote to his road-gang for he must help the Gypsy Alexander and the gardener Steffen with the cementing of this floor, though these two in turn are likewise hard-pressed, the one with his smoking of salmon, the other with the necessity of hilling the potatoes and weeding out the turnip beds. The whole pinch for time lies simply in the Consul's unquenchable thirst for activity.

"Altmulig," he says, "it has just occurred to me that Olsen, that old skipper of mine, never seems to look after anything any more. He seems to spend most of his time raising potatoes and going to the movies with his wife and children. You'd never know he was working for me. I was wondering in what condition he left the sloop. Do you know?"

Altmulig says nothing.

"I'm afraid he's left things pretty much open so that anyone can get in. I believe we ought to lock things up on board."

Altmulig says nothing.

"Do you suppose you could see to this, Altmulig? Fit her with locks both fore and aft. And there are some bed-clothes and other things to be brought ashore. You can obtain what locks you require at the store."

Altmulig: "Ay ay, sir."

The Consul inspects the cement work. "Well, I see you're getting on in fine shape."

"We'll have to hurry if we want to be finished in time. We've another garage to build, you know."

The Consul receives this with a jolt: "Good Heavens, I had quite forgotten about that!"

The Herr Consul has so many things to remember, Alt-

mulig politely suggests. But with regard to garage number two, the one down at the store—the Consulate!—it had been Altmulig himself who had brought up the need for it. He now reports that he would knock out the wall between the stall and the carriage floor and turn the whole place into a garage.

“Does it have to be as large as all that?”

“It ought to be,” Altmulig replies, “to make room for the gasoline tanks, the spare parts, the oil cans and a lap robe to use when it’s cold.”

“Of course. Naturally. Do you drive a car yourself?”

“Well, I haven’t got an operator’s license.”

“I have one,” says the Consul. “But mine is English. We must both see about getting ourselves Norwegian licenses. It is possible that I shall need you to drive for me on occasion.”

He nods and is on his way, thinking no doubt how fortunate he is to have a man such as Altmulig to fathom his every problem—a miracle-worker, a genius in head and hand. And how well he knew how to behave! Had it come to Altmulig’s mind to congratulate him upon his consular appointment? Of course not, he had simply addressed him as “Herr Consul.” Others would have stepped up, seized his hand and vulgarly congratulated him. Skipper Olsen, for example. . . .

There stands Altmulig, for his own part smoothing out a cement floor and anything but pleased in his mind. He is waiting on pins and needles for that money of his which never arrives. Not that he is hard-up for cash—he still receives his regular pay from the chief, enough to care for his needs—no, what he really lacks is capital. Furthermore, he is constantly being interrupted, summoned from all quarters and never able to see anything through to a clean finish. To fit locks aboard the sloop will take him away from his work just that long; his two assistants will be helpless to go on without him. And briefly, he ought to

have paid a certain call down in South Parish long before this. But does he ever find himself with a spare moment on his hands? Oh, he could find important enough business to take him down into South Parish, some downright pressing errand. Never fear as to that, for who could contradict him? But during the day he has no time, and during the night he must sleep. . . .

"Go on back to your regular work until I'm finished aboard the sloop," he says to his helpers.

"All right," they say. "But we could keep right on here, then maybe we could get through some time. What do you think yourself, Altmulig?"

"Think? You have your orders!"

But Alexander has something of a personal interest in the matter and— "It's all foolishness to lock up the sloop," he says.

Altmulig ignores the remark.

"For there isn't a lock made that can't be picked," says Gypsy Alexander.

Altmulig looks at him. "Take my advice and stay off that sloop after I'm finished there today."

"Hm."

"Ay, just you take my advice! Unless you want to run into something you're not looking for!"

"What are you talking about? What should I run into?"

"I've warned you," mumbles August and with that he crosses himself.

The Gypsy, as an afterthought: "No, I—that I should go aboard? No, all I said was that we should hurry up and get finished here. Come on, Altmulig, don't go and get mad now!"

On Sunday August took the bull by the horns and left for South Parish. Naturally he could not get there afoot in a minute, but who ever heard of a man crawling out of

bed and shaving himself at three o'clock in the morning in order to be in South Parish at ten!

He does not deck himself out in all the finery he has to his name, but he does put on a brand-new red-plaid shirt over which he buttons no more than the bottom two buttons of his vest in order to expose his shining breast.

What does he want down at that new house of Tobias'? Has he come on a pressing errand? No one can contradict him. He is August. He is an old free-lance wanderer, a stranded sailor, his trade is *alt mulig*, everything under the sun, his place is everywhere, his life's meaning changes day by day. Do not ask him about his errand. It is for him to raise that issue. He is just like everyone else, save that he has a bit more intelligence, a bit more ingenuity; he has a sense of grandeur and adventure, he evolves plans and has the will-power to execute them—the equipment, as well. Otherwise, he is just like everyone else. And yet—

It is he who can ask: What in the world has become of all I have got out of life? A scamp and a prevaricator, a braggart, a gambler, a fool, a law-breaker, too, at times—but innocent of malice, naïve to a degree, and born with a friendly nature, and the ability to enjoy one's self. Here he stands today in his old age and, in the language of Gordon's accountancy, his assets exceed his liabilities.

A loser he has been in every undertaking, in love, in his quest for lasting joy, in the rightful cravings of his nature. Fate has exacted substantial deductions from whatever gains he may have made in this life. Down-right abused he has been, no blessings have fallen upon his head, behind him, wherever he has gone, ruins have lain in his wake, though he has always striven to give the best that was in him. And how he has striven! Who has ever found him at his wits' end? For him life has been less to relish than to endure; he has staggered along under the weight of his days and his years. And now his

time is over and he knows it; no change shall come into his life, no ultimate reward shall be his; he expects no justice, nor even mercy. And yet—

And yet he makes straight for South Parish and the house where Tobias lives. And he lies by saying that he has come on pressing business, to look at a horse—a horse he has already seen. Well, who can contradict him?

Upon his arrival the household is thrown into a panic of excitement. To the extent of their humble means, the members of the family are attired in their Sunday best, Cornelia even with a silver ring on her finger. But did they have a single thing to entertain him with in the way of food? The cupboard was bare; in desperation the mother of the house stood there with her hands upon her breast and said: "We have company! We have company!" Cornelia tore the kerchief from about her head, dusted off a chair and invited their guest to sit down.

"You mustn't let yourselves get all upset just because of me," said August, though inwardly he had no objection to being regarded as an important arrival.

Nor was this the first time the family had seen him; both Tobias and his wife had already made a trip into town to thank him and bless him for the horse. And they had been bewildered and excited then, too, though that was not to be wondered at, when they suddenly found themselves the recipients of this clear gift of a horse—the rich stranger had waved all suggestion of a promissory note aside. They had enumerated all the horse's good points, told how they had come across the animal in the neighbouring parish and purchased it on the spot—a mare, brown with a black mane and tail, a white face, four legs—ay, naturally she had four legs, but sturdy legs, they meant, as sturdy as fence-posts—four sturdy fence-posts for legs, was what they had meant to say. The only trouble with her was that she had a bit of a bad temper, she had a little trick of laying back her ears, but this was

unimportant, hardly noticeable, in fact, and Cornelia and her mother could easily capture her by offering her a wisp of hay. They could never thank him enough for this wonderful mare, never so long as they lived. . . . "I'll come out and look at the horse some day soon," August had said. And today he has come.

Cornelia's small sisters and brothers have huddled themselves in one corner of the room and stand there peering out at him. They are wearing but little in the way of clothing; all are barefoot, all have grey starved faces and long silken eyelashes—the family trait. One small lad has a wide-awake appearance, the faces of the others seem dull and lifeless. There are four of them in all. Including Cornelia, the grown son who remained in Lofoten and the daughter in service at the druggist's, there are seven children in the family. Prolific parents, it would seem.

Various religious tracts and pamphlets left behind by the evangelist are in evidence about the house. It is annoying to August to be reminded of this man and he inquires tartly what kind of a fellow he had been. A person to keep in one's house, for example?

Ay, he had been a first rate man.

How first rate? Had he been anything else but a miserable whelp of a vagabond?

Ay, said Tobias—an extra fine fellow.

Had he paid for his keep?

Lord, yes. Paid for the whole sheep. Slaughtered a sheep for him, they had.

August could get nowhere with them; they defended the evangelist, shielded his head with their hands. Paid for the sheep—well, why shouldn't he have paid for it? He had eaten it up before he left, had he not? August is many times on the point of interrupting this distressing conversation by asking to be shown the horse, but he keeps on asking questions. Had he been a young man? What had he looked like? Questions which had for three

weeks been plaguing his mind. They had probably polished his shoes for him, Cornelia had perhaps sewed buttons on his clothes, they had seen him off on the ship—oh, there were so many secrets to be fathomed!

"I got this silver ring from him," says Cornelia.

"What!" August screams at the ceiling. "What did you get that for?"

"I don't know, he just gave it to me. Took it off his own finger and gave it to me."

"Show me the horse!" bellows August, rising.

They go outside, the whole family takes him out to show him the horse. It is grazing in a field at the side, it glances up, lays back its ears in silent fury and continues to nibble the grass.

"Don't get too near her, children!" their father warns. And with that he proceeds once again to enumerate the creature's fine points, beginning with her remarkable powers of digestion. "See how broad and strong she is! Look at those legs! As sturdy as fence-posts, I'd say!" Then—"I wish as you'd look in her mouth," he suggests, "have a look at her teeth—"

No, August was not the least bit interested in her teeth; he said that he could see at a glance that she was a splendid animal. No one could tell him anything about horses. Look straight through them, he could! And in order to emphasize his knowledge of horse-flesh, he adjusted his nose-glasses and studied the mare from all angles.

They were unable to capture the creature for the purpose of stroking it and admiring its coat. Hardly! The beast would scowl out of the corner of its eye and immediately turn its back on anyone attempting to approach. "Well, she has that little bad habit," said Tobias. "But otherwise she's as gentle as a lamb!" And again he undertook to offer August his extravagant thanks and blessings. . . .

August draws Cornelia to one side and speaks to her in a low voice: he has not seen her since that first time, where has she been keeping herself?—Home. She's been home the entire time. Many things to do. Hilling potatoes. Of late she's been cutting peat.—She might have come to town and gone to the movies with him.—Ay, that would have been fun! She has heard about them. Living people and animals just like in real life!—Would she like to go with him that evening?—Oh, if only she could! But she has the creatures to tend to and the milking.—Couldn't her mother do the milking?—Heavens, 'twas not to be thought of!

"It's just that you don't want to!" he said. "All right!" he added with a hurt nod of the head. He could see at once how things stood! He took a couple of long strides but he lacked the fine courage to leave her and go off by himself and sulk.

She for her own part felt badly and she, too, took several long strides to catch up with him. "Could I have a few words with you?" she asked.

"All right, let's go over to the barn."

He held no illusions, his time was over, had been over for more than a human generation. He had nought save antiquity to lavish upon her; he lacked future, significance. But he had felt a foolish little warm spot glowing in his breast. Age had crushed his heart beneath the weight of many long years, but one day that heart had none the less fluttered because of two eyes which had looked at him from beneath their fringes of long silken lashes and a feeling of tenderness had seized him, a sweet urge to be something to the girl.

They were walking against the wind and for her this was nothing at all. For him, however, this was trouble enough; his old eyes watered and he was compelled to wipe his cheeks without letting her see. Oh, but the devil, he

was still what he was, was he not?—a man in a red plaid shirt, a man who could make a gift of a horse or two!

The barn was empty and bare, not a wisp of hay or anything else to offer them comfort, so they sat down, side by side, in the doorway. They sat down and looked back in the direction of the mare grazing in the field beside the house. Nought else was there to see save the road and a youth rambling along from the neighbouring farm.

"What was it you wanted to talk to me about?" August asked.

"Nothing," she replied. "I just didn't want you to be angry with me!"

He decided to give her more time and fell to stabbing the ground with his staff. Meanwhile she kept her eyes fastened upon the youth rambling down the road. She did not utter a word. No, it appeared that Cornelia had withdrawn into herself and would refuse to talk.

"Where was that preacher fellow from?" August asked.

"The preacher? I don't know."

"Well, he must be from some place, mustn't he?"

"Ay, I suppose he must."

"Hahaha, I have to laugh when I think of it, but is it so that he baptised folk?"

"Of course. But we didn't get ourselves baptised. None of us did."

"He wanted you to, though, I suppose?"

"He mentioned it. But he wanted to wait until he came back."

"What, is he coming back here? No, I imagine that will depend just a wee bit upon what the Consul has to say about it, if I should happen to mention the matter to him!" August nodded and tightened his lips.

The youth is rambling past; his face is unnaturally pale and he appears to be greatly excited over something.

Just as he is passing he calls out: "Well, I see you're having a good time!"

Cornelia herself goes pale as death but August takes no notice. He is absorbed entirely in his own problem and asks: "Did he have a beard?"

"What's that?" she asked, bewildered. "That lad?"

"I mean that preacher fellow, that vagabond. I asked if he had a beard."

"Oh, him! Yes, a long beard."

"Naturally. He's one of the kind that never take the trouble to shave, but go about looking like pigs. Excuse me!"

"Ay," says Cornelia and she too laughs.

"But was it perhaps a thick pretty-looking beard?" August inquires sarcastically.

Cornelia laughs again. "No, I don't think so. Just ordinary," she says.

"Was he young?"

"Young, did you say? No."

August glances at her with something akin to humility in his eyes. "Ay, but I suppose he was younger than me?" he asks.

"I couldn't say. How old are you?"

"Oh," answers August, evasively. "I'm a real old man now. Just a worn-out piece of junk."

"My, how you talk!" she says mildly.

"Ay, that I'll admit straight out, An old piece of junk!" His contempt for the vagabond preacher leads him to deliver a further blast in that direction. "So he isn't as old as I am, eh? Then I'm mindful to know what the devil he had to come simpering around here for. You can tell him from me that I've no more use for him than I have for this stick I've got in my hand. Who ever heard of such a thing! Too lazy to shave off that beard of his! A fool, that's what he was, a mere puppy, a cock with a comb——"

"No, no, no! He was not!"

"He certainly was, and I know it. But that's nothing. A man to be a real man has to be old. That's what I mean!"

"Ay."

"I'll give that fellow something he's not bargaining for. Now what do you say to that?"

"I? What do I care about *him*!"

"Hm?" asks August, amazed.

"What do you mean? It's not the preacher I'm to have."

August, still more deeply amazed: "Yes, but—you see, I thought——"

"Hahaha!" Cornelia laughs. She throws back her head and laughs uproariously.

August thought for a moment and, as usual, came back with a quick retort: "Well then, you can go to the movies with me, can't you?"

She shook her head. "Didn't you see the lad who just went by?" she asked.

"That lad? Ay. Oh, so he's the one you're to have?"

She stepped down from her seat and made sure the youth was a good distance away. Returning, she was more communicative, she was willing to talk. Ay, he was always after her. She couldn't go anywhere, either to a dance or a meeting, without his flying into a rage. He was furious with her now just because he had seen her sitting there with another man. She didn't know what she was going to do with him.

August fell into a brown study, gave thought to the manifold complexities of life. "But," he said, "if it isn't that preacher fellow you're to have, why the devil did I get myself all worked up over him?"

Cornelia laughed and answered that she had wondered about that herself.

So August had lost again, had staked much and lost again. Regret and deep chagrin, his world seemed topsy-

turvy. Nevertheless, he was gallant in defeat. "Ay," he said, "now that it's a young good-looking lad you're to have, Cornelia, there's all the difference in the world. I say no more."

But now it was her turn to open her heart and it seemed as though this were the matter about which she had intended to speak to August. "Things aren't so definitely settled between us," she said.

"Hm. Then maybe you don't care as much for him as you might, eh?" he asked.

She sighed and shook her head. Then suddenly she burst into tears. Oh, the manifold complexities of life! The point was: she had another lad!

August was speechless.

And the fact of the matter was that relations between this other youth and herself were becoming more and more settled and definite. Ay, but Hendrik, he would give her no peace. So really she didn't know what in the world to do. Why, this very day he had come to her and threatened to shoot them both.

"Hold on, hold on! Wait a minute!" said August. "Who said he was going to shoot?"

"Hendrik. The one we just saw go by."

"Well, what's the other one's name?"

"Benjamin. He's from North Parish. But Hendrik said he would shoot him right off the face of this earth——"

"Oh, go kiss your grandmother!" snorted August.

"And he means what he says, too. He's been and asked that Aase."

"That Aase? Oh, piffle!"

"She has given him much advice, for Aase, she's angry at us and would like to make things hard for us. It's all because of one time when we couldn't put her up over night. She's tried to make things hard for us ever since. She carries a grudge so long. That's why the whole thing seems so awful."

"Don't you bother your head about such stuff!" August said in a soothing voice. "He wouldn't dare shoot. And as for that Aase, I'll see she is put in prison. And I can do it, too. I've been thinking of it for some time."

Cornelia, catching her breath. "Bless you! I knew if only I could have a talk with you——"

August swelled and went further to console her. Did she imagine for a moment that Hendrik would dare to shoot! How old was he?

"Twenty-two. But that Benjamin, he's twenty-four."

"You shall have that Benjamin!" August decided. And now it was his intense desire that she should look to him; the time was ripe for him to declare himself. "Don't sit there crying, a young thing like you!" he says. "You don't see me crying, do you? I'm a worn-out piece of junk—there's no use trying to deny it—a perfect example of an old broken-down thing, like a star that falls out of the sky because it's too old and weak to hold on any more—you needn't try to deny it. But I've had my day, and what a day it was!"

"Ay, I dare say you have!"

"You may be sure of that!" he said, beginning to boast. "Why, Lord bless your soul, you never saw anything like the figure I used to cut when I was young. Once I had three after me at the same time and here you've only two. And another time a party of girls chased me out on the ice. Yes sir, and the ice was strong enough to hold me, but there were five girls after me and that was too much for it—it broke and down they went. I'll never forget it. Two of the girls were as pretty as could be——"

"But what happened to them?" Cornelia anxiously asked.

"Oh, I saved them," August said to relieve her mind.

If he had abused the evangelist too shabbily, he went far to make up for it now. He entertained her and consoled himself with the tales he told her, perhaps even be-

lieving the words he spoke. After rattling off a number of yarns, he came out with this one: They were in a foreign land, it seems, and a young girl was sitting outside her door playing on a harmonica. It was lovely music she was playing and the girl herself was beyond his powers of description, so utterly lovely she was. She had numberless strings of pearls about her neck and her body was draped with no more than a mantle of gauze—it was a summer day and the air was warm. In her own language they had called her Signora, so that was probably her name. The moment she saw him, she rose to her feet, walked over to him and smilingly invited him into the house. Inside she refused to sit anywhere save on his lap. . . . “Cornelia, you must believe me, she was a sweetheart worth having! But there was trouble between us when it came time for me to go back to my ship, for you see I was on shore-leave at the time. Well sir, I couldn’t do a thing with her. She was determined to go aboard with me and she insisted she would never leave me so long as she lived. Do you know what I did? I took her aboard with me, gave her something to drink and a few other things besides. But in the meantime a pack of swine ashore began shooting at me.”

“Shooting at you?”

“Ay, but that didn’t bother me any in those days. The worst trouble was when the time came for her to go back ashore, for that she refused to do and simply sat down and cried.”

“So you didn’t stay with her?”

“A thousand times impossible! How could I stay with them all? She was only one. But she was with me in my cabin for a good long time, and my, how pleased and happy she was over that! Ay, that was in the old days!” said August, with a sigh.

He must have enjoyed rolling these juicy stories over his tongue; they did him good, they were all he needed. When Cornelia asked him if he had never been married,

it would have been sweet indeed to have answered: "Not yet!" But, instead, he fell sad and intimated that such bliss had been denied him by fate. Oh, but he had had many earthly experiences, and one time, in particular, in a land where the palms and raisins grow, he had been engaged to marry a certain girl but nothing had ever come of it.

Had she died, then?

Ay, God rest her bones! He paused to feel sorry for himself, uttered a series of pathetic sighs. He might have asked Cornelia to blow her cool breath upon him, as though he were a child that had bruised its head. But—"So much for that!" he said. "I've had my day! And this much I can say for myself: I've never married any of them and gone off and left them with a lot of children to support. No sir, I've never done anything but well by them. I've never committed any sins against them."

"Ay, and even we got a horse from you! Good Heavens, if only we could do something for you in return!"

"A mere trifle!" said August.

"We've wondered at home if we couldn't maybe darn socks for you or something else like that. But, I suppose it's an insult even to mention a thing like that. You have everything that anyone can——"

Suddenly Hendrik appears around the corner of the barn; he scowls at them and is on the point of going his way.

August, suddenly wide awake: "Hendrik, come here!"

Hendrik looks over his shoulder and halts in his tracks. He has become startingly aware of the fact that August is sitting there with a revolver in his hand.

"Come here, I said!"

"What do you want with me?" asks Hendrik, deathly pale.

"Oh no! Oh no!" pleads Cornelia.

August: "I hear you've been threatening to use a gun

on some one. I'd just like to warn you against it. Do you see that aspen over there? Do you see that red leaf?"

"Ay, what about it?"

"Just this!"—August crosses himself, forehead and breast, takes momentary aim and fires.

The red aspen leaf has disappeared, only the branch is left there trembling. A bull's-eye, fool luck. Hendrik's jaw drops open. A miracle from Heaven that the bullet found its mark, for the shot had been fired at random. But August had paused to cross himself twice and no doubt that had helped—there was something uncanny about it, an act of sorcery, an appeal to the Evil One for help—ay, and thus was Aase powerless!

August looks at the boy. "You can see, I'm a fellow you'd better steer clear of!"

"Ay——"

"Now step over to that aspen and I'll put a nick in your ear!"

"Oh no! Oh no!" Cornelia squeals.

Hendrik's teeth are chattering. "I didn't mean—that wasn't what I meant—I never—I only said it to——"

"Go on home!" August commands him.

Cornelia leaps to her feet, clutches the boy's arm and off they flee together.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

THE sloop had been locked up fore and aft, whatever could be the reason which had called forth this measure. What was the matter with Gordon Tidemand? He hadn't suspected his mother of anything, had he? That couldn't have been it; he had had no grounds for suspicion. She had merely been aboard to look around. Nevertheless for several days Gammelmoderen had been deeply concerned over something; she had missed a certain belt of hers and if it were on the sloop she could have left it, it would now be locked up tight. Delicious food for scandal.

She could not go aboard again to search for it, nor could she ask Altmulig if he had found it. The situation was painful indeed. Naturally Altmulig might of his own accord have let fall a word or two; she had given him the opportunity, had smiled and dropped the proper hints; but no, he had said nothing. So there was nothing more to be done about it.

But a final ruling in the account was that the sloop was now locked up. But it was more than the mere cabin of a sloop Gammelmoderen now found herself deprived of. Of a truth, she was still young in body and spirit; it was splendid to feel herself a part of life once more, and, since she was not of an age to be free from all possible danger, she had a devil of a lot of courage when it came to taking risks.

She was always present when there was salmon on hand to be smoked. She had important duties to perform in the course of this delicate process; the right kind of smoke was essential and in exactly the needed volume. She was indispensable there in the smokehouse.

But to an equal extent was the Gypsy Alexander likewise indispensable. So there you have it: an indispensable pair. There was no one to equal him at hauling salmon out of the sea, no one could split the fish so evenly down the spine, no one could salt it and stretch it and take out the bones as neatly as he. The gardener Steffen had attempted it, but he had made a mess of things. And when all these preparatory tasks had been performed, Alexander would mount the roof and hang the salmon in even rows down into the smoke-vent and lightly cover it over. And there again had the gardener Steffen proved clumsy; once he had lowered a string of salmon all the way down into the fire pit. No, there was an art and a science to smoking salmon.

It was likewise Alexander's task to cut peat and heather and moss and juniper for use in the smoking process, for this was a combination of fuel which would give forth billows of smoke without once bursting into flame. Adjoining the smokehouse itself was a storage bin packed with this fuel. The moss and juniper must be kept at all times moist, the peat and heather dry. So here too was a question of science.

Alexander was a good man for the job, an expert at work of this nature. He had elevated the smoked salmon industry at Segelfoss to the point where shipments were made to the cities, to the point where it was earning a steady profit upon which the chief had already begun to rely. That Alexander, that Gypsy! Tall, thin, a lonely man, no friends in the town, but a tower of strength in himself, steel in that back-bone of his. And all were, in truth, against this swarthy stranger, and he would hardly have bothered to remain on the place had he not been both subtle and cunning—he would not have bothered to stay on, were it not for Gammelmoderen.

The affair between the two was audacious and thoroughgoing, though not entirely lacking in glamour, passion,

and romantic love. There was a mad though loyal bond between them—a bond of Gypsy forging—which nothing could break asunder and which under different circumstances might have been given a fairer name. They might have parted company to their mutual advantage. But this they did not; their passion was as poignant as youth's first love. But it was dangerous and deeply afflicted.

They had met during their younger days, he and the widow of Theodore paa Bua. The original fusion of their passion had taken place during a golden opportunity out in the berry field—she had given him a certain look upon leaving the house and he had gone a round-about way and met her. Violence—violence and violation, but so welcome, so unimpeachable. Ay, and their affair had continued without interruption throughout two whole summers and one winter. When they parted, they had had good cause to remember each other and when they met again they had neither of them changed; they were the same mad lovers they had been during their earliest youth. Segelfoss again, he and she again, wine and rapture, madness and bold adventure. And their conscience was perfectly clear—Theodore paa Bua was dead.

They had a deep secret between them, did they not? Yes, but they never mentioned it to each other, never referred to it, not once during their moments together. But it was there all the time like a tender bond between them. Possibly the parental emotion. Both were devoted to Gordon Tidemand.

"They've locked up the sloop," she told him.

"I know it," he replied.

"They've locked up the sloop," she repeated softly to herself.

The fact had not seemed to bowl him over; he smiled, and he had such white teeth in that swarthy face of his. Everyone considered Alexander's eyes too piercing and they were all a little afraid of him, but she—she called

him Otto and loved him. Oh, how deeply in love with him she was! And this was so strange. He was frivolous and cunning; he pilfered and robbed and appeared none too pleasing from the rear, he had no sense of honour toward anyone, he seldom bathed, went about with gold rings in his ears, blew his nose through his fingers—all this and even more. But he was hot-headed and pugnacious; as lithe as a willow, he could leap a good meter aside before one could strike him a blow, and once he had jumped out of a second-storey window in the main building and landed on his toes—all this, as well. He was a tramp and a rogue. But Gammelmoderen had no fault to find with him; he was possessed of the voracious eroticism of his race and he kept her in a constant state of yearning. They had been in the habit of meeting four, or at least, three times each week, though there had never been any definite arrangement. But now they no longer had a comfortable sloop cabin in which to lie as man and wife, now they could only meet out in the smokehouse occasionally when there was salmon to be smoked. But he was never at a loss, even so; a wild fancy might strike him and he would gather her into his arms, wrestle with her and drag her bodily into the storage bin where the peat and heather was stored.

"The door!" she exclaims. "The door is open!"

But he cares not for that, he cares for nothing in the world but her. The odour of peat and heather assails their nostrils; they are out in the berry field again!

Afterwards neither of them appear any too bold; no, they realize the risk they have taken.

She says: "You're so careless, Otto!"

"Ay, but what other way is there for us?"

"But what if someone had come?" she asked.

"Ay," he answered with a shake of his head.

"And if some other time someone should come?"

"Ay."

The storage bin was a dangerous retreat and it was

foolhardy indeed to leave the door open. But possibly an open door, after all, is less likely to arouse suspicion than a closed one. Furthermore the floor of the smokehouse would emit a loud squeak were anyone to come. Oh, but it couldn't go on that way, in the long run it couldn't go on! Well? They would have to find another way. They were really in a tight place at last. They could not walk along the same pathway together without having eyes staring at them from this window or that. Alexander shared his room with the gardener Steffen, and Gammelmoderen's room in the main building adjoined the nursery on the one hand and Marna's room on the other. A luckless tryst in Gammelmoderen's room, nought else, had been the cause of Alexander's miraculous leap from a second-storey window to the ground.

Everything seemed so preposterous.

But a storage bin and a bed of peat and heather, these were at least accessible; all they had to do was walk in. And—"Leave it to me!" Alexander would say. "Leave it to me!"

So there was no great change, after all.

Time after time they had taken alarm and nothing serious had happened. They were helpless but they were bold. They let things go.

Now and then they would be called away for some purpose, Gammelmoderen to wait upon Fru Juliet or the children, Alexander to perform some small service in the kitchen—lift some heavy object or kill a mouse in the wood-box. They were at close hand and easy to find. Possibly there were times when they were intentionally disturbed. No, their position was anything but enviable.

See, there comes Altmulig now with orders for Alexander to come finish up the work in the garage. The concrete they had laid Saturday had had two days to set. It would be all right now for them to proceed with their work.

"Haven't got the time," answered Alexander.

"The fact is we're putting up a garage," said Altmulig. "And we'll have to hurry the work along."

"You must go, Otto," said Gammelmoderen.

They made short work of the garage at the Manor and moved their tools down to the Consul's place of business in town. Their first task there was to tear down a partition. After that they spaded up the ground, set up scaffoldings and started in pouring cement. A big piece of work; August was here, there and all over. He had it in mind to make the place over into a really fine garage. The consular escutcheon had recently arrived and now appeared as the only object of embellishment outside the chief's private office. August had decided of his own accord to brace the walls of his garage with steel struts and divide the wall-space off into panels. This work could, if necessary, be performed after the arrival of the Consul's new car.

There came spectators to watch him at work—loafers and youngsters. Editor Davidsen of the *Segelfoss News* came and interviewed Altmulig about this auto stable which already had the appearance of a residence fit for a lord. The doctor's young sons were there constantly and it was impossible to shoo them away. Two young hellions, they were, forever climbing about and sitting astride the roof beams. To be sure they climbed to no great height, but the floor beneath them was of solid concrete, as hard as rock, were either of them to fall. Altmulig spoke to them frequently and warned them particularly against standing on one foot on the beams, a trick they had begun to perform. And yes, he had been right: one day the elder of the two boys came tumbling down. From no great height, to be sure, but the floor was as hard as rock and the impact was exactly what was to be expected. He laughed and said that he was all right, but when he tried to get up, he found he could no longer stand. No, there was some trouble

with one of his legs—it was broken. So he had had a serious fall, in spite of Altmulig's warnings. Alexander took him on his back and carried him home.

There was great excitement at the doctor's, the mother beside herself and unconsolable, the doctor desiring to take his son to the hospital in Bodø, unable to do so for three days as there would be no south-bound steamer until then, and thus himself obliged to set the leg in temporary splints. No end of excitement in the house, for the boy was not laughing now, he was bellowing.

The following day the doctor's wife came racing up to August, beside herself and unconsolable: her son had put in a perfectly hideous night, he had screamed and was possibly even dying, for his father, the doctor, had probably squeezed all life out of the leg with all those awful splints, that's the way it looked, and he had given the boy drops to make him sleep, but he hadn't been able to sleep. She had begged him to administer a stronger dose, but he had refused. Now she had heard about . . . the doctor's wife draws August with her out into the street, far away from the garage, meanwhile continuing to chatter her explanations: everyone was so kind, a neighbour woman had come to the house and she had heard of someone who could put a person to sleep, who could soothe that boy of hers; he screamed so and he couldn't fall asleep and now August must help her in her trouble. . . .

Ay, August would help the doctor's wife, he would help that sweet little Esther who had herself been unable to sleep and who was now so utterly beside herself. "Just you take and go home now," he said. "I'll throw on my coat and be off in a jiffy."

"Do you think you can find her?"

"Don't you worry about that!" answers August. Oh that August, he was always so emphatic about the things he said. "Don't you worry about that!" he had said.

"And this would be such a good time, just now," says the doctor's wife. "My husband was called out this afternoon and he thought he would be gone quite some time."

August looks at his watch and reports: "She will be in your house before six o'clock!"

August kept his word; Aase came to the house. He had made tracks straight to South Parish and inquired indirectly as to her whereabouts. Wandering about as was her custom, he had learned, and the day before she had been into town. He had located her at last in the old Lapp's hut where she lived, had paused on the threshold to cross himself as a precaution against her power of evil, and stepped in. Aase was willing at once, Aase had nothing against being called to the doctor's house.

"It's a lucky thing I found you," said August.

"I was expecting a message," she replied. "That's why I am at home."

"It's a broken leg," he explained.

"I knew it before you told me," she replied.

She knew it before he had told her! Hearing this, August again took the trouble to cross himself. The devil was in this female creature!

They began walking off together. "You're not to come with me, do you hear!" she said, motioning him away. With that she went stalking off alone, tall, of proud and regal carriage. Arriving at the doctor's home, she marched without hesitation straight up the steps in front. The lady herself admitted her and led the way up to the sick room. As though by tacit agreement they stole softly without speaking up the stairs—to be sure, the doctor was out of the house, but there were the maids to be considered.

Aase stationed herself by the bed and gently picked up the patient's hands. The lad was so amazed by the sight of her that he let out a little squeak. He quite neglected to bellow. In truth he had never had any real cause for bel-

lowing; it had been merely a case of bad temper with him, he had bellowed merely to arouse his mother's sympathy.

"See here!" says the lady, turning back the covers.—If only her husband, the doctor, had been here now!—"Just see here! Great ugly wooden sticks, bound all up with wire! Is there any wonder that he screams? Bound all up like that——"

Aase passed her hand up and down the bandaged leg and pulled up the covers again. She observed that the lad was staring curiously at all the dingedangles hanging from her belt and that he was attempting to pull himself up in the bed to get a better look at them. Aase removed the belt, handed it to him and said: "Hold it a bit."

"Am I to hold it?"

"Ay, look at it closely."

This was not a difficult thing to get him to do. Such odd things: a smoking pipe of iron with a tiny perforated iron lid, a clever piece of work, and the pipe itself so graceful and so small; tobacco in a leather pouch, punk in another pouch, steel and flint for striking fire, objects of bone and silver, a foreign coin on a string, a knife in a case, the knife inlaid, the case engraved with symbols and runes; last of all a heart.

"Smell of it!" said Aase.

It contained a little sponge; there was nothing more strange than that inside, nothing to spring out and strike one in the eyes!

"Smell of it!" said Aase.

The lad smelled of it and said: "What an awful smell! Here, mama, you smell!" They both smelled and Aase said to the boy: "Now smell it a little more!"

The boy was ever so deeply fascinated by all the oddities attached to Aase's belt, but at length he became tired and offered to hand the little museum back to her.

"Hold it a little longer!" said Aase.

"No, why should I!" fretted the boy, but he obeyed and

again inspected the articles which hung from the belt. He was quite drowsy by this time and began to yawn; his eyelids had grown heavy, now and then he would close them and open them again with a start, but at length he kept them closed.

His mother whispered ecstatically: "He's asleep! Just to think, he's asleep!"

Aase moved over to the door and motioned the boy's mother to accompany her; outside in the hall they remained standing together. It was then that Aase began to speak mystical and incomprehensible things to little Fru Esther. Oh, she drew herself up, puffed out her chest and affected an air of deep wisdom; she also performed a number of nonsensical rites, such as taking her own tongue between her fingers and swaying her body. And little Fru Esther, she thought this woman both handsome and hideous with that uncoiffed hair of hers which fell to her shoulders, those large horse-like teeth, that coldly arrogant face beneath the pointed cap she wore. Her hands were long and unclean, her fingers covered with heavy rings.

"I can never thank you enough," says Fru Esther.

Aase: "When he wakes up, turn his night-shirt inside out and put it back on like that."

"Ay."

"And see as he wears it that way for a day and a night."

Fru Esther nods.

"Then the doctor can take him to Bodø! Such will do him no harm. I've stroked him back to full health."

"Will he be lame or have a stiff leg?"

"No."

"Oh, to think he won't be lame!" exclaims Fru Esther, enraptured. "Aase, see here! Take this—it's only a bank-note, such a small amount for such a great blessing. Please don't spurn it!"

But Aase draws herself up again and brushes the money aside: "Away with it. Don't even want to look at it. Have no use for it—hm, money! What are you thinking of——"

At this moment they hear the front door opening below. The doctor lets himself in, closes the door behind him and walks about through the rooms downstairs, calling in a loud voice: "Esther! Esther!"

"Yes!" his wife calls softly down the stairs to him. She is trembling, she would like to get Aase out of the way, urges her to retreat up into the attic. But Aase is proud and is of no mind to retreat. No, it is not for Aase to hide from any man!

The doctor mounts the stairs. His wife urges him to be quiet. "Sh! He's asleep. Aase has put him to sleep!"

"What's that?" asks the doctor. "Aase?"

"Yes. She came and put him to sleep."

The doctor flashes his teeth and utters an enraged laugh.

"The idiocy of some women!" he growls.

His wife: "Don't forget, he hasn't had a wink of sleep for a day and a half——"

"Get out of here!" the doctor commands, addressing Aase and pointing down the stairs.

"He has my belt——"

"Yes," explains Fru Esther. "He's asleep with that belt of hers. He's lying with it in his hand. I'll——"

The doctor is already on his way into the boy's room.

"Don't wake him up," his wife whispers after him. "Oh, don't wake him up, I beg of you!"

"Here!" says the doctor, thrusting the belt with its cluster of dingedangles into Aase's hand. "Now get out!"

Aase pauses deliberately to fasten the belt about her waist. The doctor is no doubt impatient over the delay this involves; he attempts to hurry her down the stairs,

he attempts something in the nature of a push to help her along.

But no, this is no way to treat such a one as Aase; in a flash she wheels about, stretches forth her arms with fingers out-spread like claws and flings them in the doctor's face.

A hoarse scream—the doctor leaps from the floor and clutches his face with his hands. Aase turns and marches proudly down the staircase.

For a moment the doctor remains stooping slightly forward, as though attempting to recover his balance.

"What's the matter?" asks his wife, trembling. "Did she injure you?"

"Injure me!" He straightens up and removes his hands from his face. "See for yourself!"

One of his eyes, bathed in its own blood, is hanging down his cheek.

CHAPTER TWELVE

HOW many silly ways folk could find to waste a man's time! Hither and yon August was called away from his work, consulted about this thing and that, gabbled at, and if there was no one else to disturb him then it would be the chief himself who would come to him with some question or problem. And when it was the Consul who addressed him, it was not for August to continue cementing his wall whilst answering; no, he must stand with body erect and deliver respectful replies.

"Can you drive a car yourself, Altmulig?"

"I haven't the papers for it."

"No operator's license, eh? I have one," said the chief, "but it's in English. I wish you would find out what we must do to obtain Norwegian licenses. I'll need you to relieve me when the occasion arises. This is a fine garage you're putting up here."

"If only we can get done with it!"

"Let's hope so! It was too bad about that tumble the doctor's youngster had in here."

Altmulig: "I warned those lads ten times if I did once, but I was only wasting my breath."

"They are incorrigible, those two. And now the doctor himself has trouble with one of his eyes and must go to the hospital as well. The ship is sailing tomorrow. By the way, I'd like to have all three of you down at the pier tomorrow to help the doctor and his son aboard."

"Ay ay, sir!"

"Fine. Then you'll see about those driving licenses, won't you? I'm sure it has something to do with the sheriff or the judge——"

Later the chief-telegraphist stopped in—the bookworm. Again August was obliged to stand erect.

Any more Russian books?

No.

Any other rare books?

No.

"I may as well tell you," the fellow said, "I bought that Russian Bible of yours."

"Ho! Didn't I know how it would be!" exclaims August. "So he turned it into money, did he!"

"He came and offered it to me."

"How much did you give for it?"

"First let me know what the man paid you for it."

"A swine about holy matters!" says August. "If I'd known that, I'd never have let him have it."

"I paid him five *kroner*. Was that too much?"

August: "He'd better not come around me any more. Once he tried to sneak off with a brand-new—that is to say, a prayer book of mine—an old prayer book——"

"What language was it?"

August returns to his work, muttering: "He'd better not try to set foot in my place again——"

Later, trouble sprang up between the road gang and the blacksmith. Adolf comes to August with a complaint; the smith was so incompetent, Altmulig must take a hand.

Very well, Altmulig has it out with the man. The smith is unskilled in his craft; the blasting drills refuse to stand up, they either shatter or crumple at a blow; the man does not know how to temper his steel.

"Ho, so you say I don't know how to harden steel, eh?"

"No. And if you can't turn out better work than that, you've had your last drill and your last pickaxe from us."

The smith laughs: "I'm the only blacksmith in town. I don't know of anyone else. Unless you'd like to get the sexton to edge your tools for you!"

"I'll telegraph for a field forge and do the work myself.

And as for that, there's nothing to prevent the Consul from getting a regular blacksmith to come here to Segelfoss."

The smith turns pale. "A regular smith, did you say? Say, I learned my work from none less than Ship-smith Orne in Tromsø."

"I can't help that, you can't temper a crow-bar so it will hold up."

"Well, maybe I can't. But if you think you can show me how, I'll be glad to take lessons from you. Hahaha!"

Altmulig is pinched for time, he is behind with his work as it is; nevertheless he thrusts a bar in the forge and sets Adolf to working the bellows. The smith is an ill-natured spectator. Altmulig is no smith, but he is *alt mulig*, which means also a smith. This job he has set his hand to positively must succeed. But he has been faced with difficult problems before, this is not the first time he has stood at an anvil—he has tempered tool steel before.

And of course he is successful. He thins out the tip of the bar, keeps a sharp eye on the heat, stands ready with a handful of sand in the event the heat should become too intense, beats down the tip again, hammers it to a fine edge and for the third time buries it in the forge, this time calling for a gentle heat—take it easy on the bellows there, Adolf; ay, take it real easy now. Carefully, oh how carefully, August handles the bar at this stage.

"Now what do *you* generally do?" he scornfully asks the smith.

"What do I do? Why, I stick it in the water. Finished!"

"Well that's not what *I* do!" said August.

No, that was not what August did; he thrust the glowing end of the crow-bar into the sand-box, held it there no longer than a split second, looked at it to make sure it had the correct bluish tint, delicately touched the tip to the surface of the water, withdrew it, touched it to the water again, withdrew it and examined it to make sure the

bluish tint had all but disappeared, thrust it into the water again, turned it about in his hands, cooled it gradually.

They tried the edge with a file; the file would not bite. The smith nodded. They tried to blunt the crowbar by striking it against the anvil; they failed; the edge was still there. The smith nodded again. "I'll try it like that after this," he said respectfully. "Now go after this drill!"

"Haven't got the time. But go at it the same way with your drills," Altmulig advised. "And a little less heat on the pickaxes as there's iron in with the steel. You must learn about these things. Remember, go easy when you're trying to harden your steel."

Altmulig was lucky this time and could strut, but he might not have been so lucky a second time. Possibly too he had employed a bit more hocus-pocus than was necessary. But he had maintained his reputation as an expert.

He turned to Adolf and said: "There's a couple of places in the road we'll have to go back and go over. Too narrow for the car, the mudguards will strike against the cliff, I'm afraid. We'll either have to build it out to the left or blast away more of the cliff to the right. I'll be up this evening and decide which will cost us least money. By the way, how are things going up the line?"

Adolf was quick to reply. "It's that Francis," he said.

"What's the matter with him?"

"He's just the same as usual."

Altmulig: "Say, you're an ass to let yourself be bothered by riff-raff like that Francis! Tell him from me that he's to keep his mouth shut while he's working for me!"

So much for that. But the interruptions, the general time-wasting continues. How discouraging! The following day Alexander fails to turn up for work in the garage. "Better and better all the time!" August bitterly complains.

"He's smoking salmon," the gardener Steffen replies.

"We'll never in all eternity be through with this garage!"

"Well, the Consul makes more money smoking and shipping off salmon."

"Money, money, money!" grates August. "What's the good of such trifles? Here I'm building a road up the mountain and a garage in town—isn't it enough that I'm doing to put this town and the people that live in it ahead? What the devil does that talk of yours amount to!"

"I merely told you what's keeping Alexander away. That's nothing to bite my head off for!"

"Do you know your way around up in North Parish?" August asks.

"That's where I come from," Steffen answers.

"Then I suppose you know a lad named Benjamin?"

"Ay, a neighbour, as you might say."

"A lad of twenty-four. Is he from a farm?"

"Ay."

"Go and get him and bring him here!"

"How's that—now?"

"Certainly. And he's to be in working clothes and have his lunch with him."

When Benjamin arrived it was afternoon—another half-day wasted. Another whole half-day! Altmulig growled to himself. Altmulig is curt and commanding, desirous perhaps of impressing this new helper of his, and possibly he has good reasons for wishing to do so.

Benjamin is a friendly lad, somewhat slow in his movements, no crack hand, but able to accomplish the tasks he is put to. It is he who is to have Cornelia, eh? Well, maybe we'll see about that! Nothing very grand about him—ptt, not a trace! He is young and that's all. But a man to amount to anything must be old!

They work on steadily until quitting time and then get things ready for the morning. Alexander will be with them tomorrow and that will be some help, at least. If only the

steamer they were waiting for would arrive this evening! Then they could help the doctor and his son aboard without wasting further working hours.

But in this they prove unfortunate: outside the store there was a telegram announcing that the steamer was late all the way north out of Senjen.

In the morning they start in working again and, as there are four of them now, they manage to accomplish quite a bit. Benjamin is a sturdy lad—yes, but let us not exaggerate—he is anything but a shining light, and furthermore he goes about with a full beard cluttering up his face. Odd people here in this world! But Altmulig sees through him at once and says: "What are you trying to look like with all that fancy trimming, a skipper or a kaiser?"

They continue their cementing for two hours or so. Then they hear the steamer whistling out at the point. Naturally, now that they have hit a stride in their work! The spell is broken. Alexander leaves them at once, for it is he who is to take in the shoreline. The others follow him to the wharf. The entire town is astir with excitement; grown folk and children and dogs, all go wandering down to the pier—even Jørn Mathildesen and his wife, Valborg from Øira make themselves part of the throng. There he goes brazenly walking along beside his wife, as smug as anyone else, and he in rags and she in her red and green dress.

Doctor Lund arrives hatless because of the bandage about his head, his son reclining on a spring mattress loaded onto a wagon. Fru Lund and her second son are accompanying the procession, Druggist Holm acting as escort. The Consul and his entire household, along with other members of Segelfoss society, are on the pier to greet them—the situation is all so sorrowful, they wish to share the misfortune.

"How in the world did it happen, Doctor?"

"Don't ask. I was due for a bit of bad luck, I suppose!"

Fru Lund is weeping, careless of the fact that tears ill-become her; sometimes she stands beside her son, sometimes beside her husband. She utters but few words, merely pats them on the cheek and shows how much she loves them. Fru Juliet does her best to console her, and with her own hand brushes out the wrinkles in Fru Esther's cloak.

"The boy is worse off than I am," says the doctor. "He should have been taken to the hospital at once. It's possible now that they may have to re-break and re-set the bone!"

"I don't know which one of you is worse off!" answers little Fru Esther, shaking her head. "You are both so badly off!"

The boy, for his part, did not seem to be taking things too hard. When any one asked him if he were in pain, the little rascal would smile and admit that, yes, those wooden splints surrounding his leg were anything but comfortable to wear!

There was no great difficulty about carrying the box-springs aboard and when the boy was safely installed in his cabin, Alexander went below to see about a number of boxes of smoked salmon he was shipping south—valuable merchandise, worth gold.

With the departure of the ship the four garage-builders returned to their work. They might have remained on the pier to watch the crowd streaming back into town, but they could not afford to waste further time. They returned to work on their garage.

Suddenly the doctor's wife appeared in the door. "Psst! One moment, August!"

August was obliged to drop his work and go out to her. Ah yes, but this time it was little Fru Esther and that was a horse of a different colour—there was no one else like her! "Keep at it, lads," he said. "I'll be right back!"

But no, he did not return immediately. Fru Esther was

beside herself and in need of consolation! August was given a full account of the affair with Aase; at length Fru Esther was doing more weeping than talking. But this seemed to ease her heart. She had no qualms about divulging the entire gruesome secret; the doctor had taken the matter calmly, but he had requested her to keep things dark. Oh, he had been so strange about the whole affair, he had; not a harsh word had he spoken to her, though it was she herself who had been to blame. He had bathed the eye and set it back in its socket and bandaged it tightly in place, but several days had now passed and something had surely gone wrong with it—he himself believed that Aase's unclean fingers had given him an infection. "Oh, it's all so horrible to think of! And now he's beginning to fear for his other eye. And that means he'll be blind—"

"Oh my, no!" said August in that emphatic manner of his. "Not a chance!" he said, with a shake of his head.

"Don't you think so, August?"

"Why, Lord bless your soul, my dear, do you think that if I got pus in one of my fingers here and had to have it cut off, I'd get pus in my other nine fingers, as well?"

And now August must tell her a story selected from his adventurous career. "Once I knew a sailor who had one of his eyes nipped out, but he wrapped it up in a piece of paper and went to the doctor and had it put back in again."

"The same eye?" the lady inquires.

"Ay, but whether it was the same identical eye or not is something I can't insist on, for I wouldn't want to exaggerate. But it must have been, for the man was gone several days and when he came back aboard he had the same number of eyes as the rest of us and even when we went right up to him and counted closely the number was always the same. No, you see, these men of science, no matter what you say, they can do just about what they

please. And I just thought of another man. Once he had a glass eye put in his head and he always insisted that he could see just as well with that glass eye as he could with his regular one. So, for that matter he might just as well have had two glass eyes in his head. . . . And it's just the same with ears, too," August goes on to explain. "How often haven't I seen it happen in countries abroad that on Sundays they would stand around talking and suddenly whip out their revolvers and shoot off some fellow's ear! But from all I could make out, that never did the man any harm—he could hear just as good as ever. No, I've never let myself get upset by the thought of losing an eye or an ear, or anything else about me, either, for in these days there's nothing stops them when it comes to fixing a fellow up. Ay, just you believe what I'm telling you."

And it was Fru Esther's earnest desire to believe him. August gave her confidence; she could speak the language of her childhood and youth with him—her mother tongue, Poldenese—without being obliged to watch her words, and this alone was a pleasure and a blessing.

August: "It was a shame and a pity about that lad of yours falling down and breaking his leg."

"Ay, but for him my man's not afraid. There will only be trouble for him if they have to break and re-set the bone. But he's not to be lame or stiff-legged, for that's what that Aase said."

"A broken bone, that's nothing in our days!"

"Ay ay, August. Now I mustn't be keeping you away from your work any longer. But I had to tell you how everything went. It seems so good to talk to you."

"I could just as well walk home with you, but I'm not much to look at in these clothes I'm in here at work."

"You mustn't even think of it, August. I can just as well walk home alone. Bright daylight and all that——"

But when August returned to the garage, Alexander

had quit the job. Yes, he had seized his opportunity and had sneaked out the back door.

"Well, by the jumping——!" shrieked August. "Where the devil has he gone to?"

"He's gone out to his net."

It would do August no good to swear. Alexander had gone his way.

Alexander had his own affairs to manage. He must empty the net of salmon, he must clear it of seaweed and jellyfish, he must cast it out again. He must prepare the salmon he has caught, must split it and smoke it and clean up his boxes in preparation for the next shipment. And last of all, it is barely possible that he may collect his usual reward from Gammelmoderen today. She had been down on the pier when the steamer had lain alongside—that sweetheart of his, and she was younger and more loveable than any of the others—she had stolen a furtive look into his eyes and blushed to the roots of her hair. There was no one who could blush quite so charmingly as she, that healthy, red-blooded creature!

Late that afternoon he arrives at the Manor with his salmon; she meets him at the door. All is well; they go out to the smokehouse together and light their smudgy flame. The door is unlocked, she is nervous, but nevertheless she glides with him into the storage bin—in there where it is dark and still. Oh Otto!

But something seems wrong this day. The entire household has been down to the pier; even Fru Juliet herself has been out, and this is not as it has been on other days; the Consul has been taken from his work in his office, in his Consulate, and now, as it is already lunch time, he strolls up home with the others. And this too is not as it has been on other days. It is just as though the two smokehouse lovers have been given exactly enough time to get down to business, but not a moment over. The door opens and

the floor outside gives forth a squeak. "Leave it to me!" Alexander manages to whisper.

Gammelmoderen begins at once to upbraid him in a loud voice. The widow of Theodore paa Bua recalls the language of her youth and uses it to good advantage. To be sure, it was impossible for her to wipe the flush of love from her face, but she scolds in a fish-wifely voice, steps out into the light and roars at him over her shoulder: "I won't stand for your impertinence! You call that good fuel, you clumsy clown! You needn't come around here and try to show me, you good-for-nothing weed, you!"

"Such monkey talk as you use!" Alexander answers her back, he angry as well. He is so downright enraged that he flings himself across the room between the Consul and his mother and storms straight out the door. Oh, but he is furious!

"What's up, mother?" asks Gordon Tidemand.

"What's up! Why, he wanted to show me how to sprinkle the moss in there, but he'd better not try that. Did you ever see anything like him? Such a clumsy clown!"

"Juliet would like a word with you," says her son and leaves her.

Next morning Alexander again appears at the garage quite ready for work. Silent and thoughtful, he seems, too. At eleven o'clock he throws on his coat and says: "I'll be right back!"

Wrathfully, August barks after him: "Someday I hope you can get rid of what's eating you!"

Alexander makes straight for the chief's private office. Oh that Gypsy, that rogue! He's up to something and there is no limit to his reckless courage. What does the chief know about that prearranged bout last evening between Gammelmoderen and her Gypsy sweetheart! He knows nothing and it is his wish to know nothing; he is

too much of a gentleman to eavesdrop or yield to petty suspicion. But Alexander, he is of no mind to be scolded again by Gammelmoderen, not if his name is Otto Alexander! Far from it, and no one need expect it of him!

He knocks on the door and steps in. Altmulig, well-disciplined chap that he is, would drop his cap to the floor and stand there at attention. But not so this Alexander, —oh no!—he is literally boiling with anger, he holds his cap in his hand and begins jabbering away at the top of his lungs even before the chief has given him permission to speak.

"There's one thing sure," he says, "I refuse to be scolded right before your ears!"

"What's that?" asks the chief, wrinkling his brow and doing his best to comprehend. "What are you talking about?"

"Like last night! You heard it!"

"Oh, that!" says the chief. "But, my dear fellow, what was there to that!"

"For I'd sooner leave the place," continues Alexander in keeping with the plan he had invented whilst working in the garage.

"That's all nonsense," says the chief.

"All right!" Alexander nods disagreeably and is on the point of leaving. "I've said all I'm going to about that!"

He is even on the point of placing his cap on his head right there inside the office. A thing which a man like Altmulig would never have dreamed of doing. But the chief is an angel for tolerance; he puts up with this crazy Gypsy, he refrains from ringing for one of his store hands to come and pitch him out through the door. To the contrary, the chief smiles ingratiatingly and asks: "But that business of last night, is that anything to get yourself all worked up over?"

"Yes!" barks Alexander.

"You certainly can't leave us on that account."

"Oh I can't, can't I! That's what you think!"

The chief turns the matter over in his mind, glances, as it were, casually at the large account for smoked salmon and says: "It is really too bad you don't feel you can stay on with us here, now that we are just beginning to show results. Frankly, I am at a loss."

Alexander likewise weighs the matter over; possibly he has gone far enough. In a somewhat milder voice he asks: "Do you think yourself it is very pleasant to be called a weed and a clumsy clown, just because we had a bit of a quarrel?"

"No, that I certainly do not," answers the chief. "And I really do not understand it. It's not at all like her. She probably became annoyed because you tried to teach her how to sprinkle the moss. Don't you see, she has been doing that very thing for many many years—since the days when my father was alive."

"Oh I know all about that!" exclaims Alexander. "I was here in those days, too. I was here when you were born. And we used to sprinkle the moss together then and she never spoke a harsh word."

"There, you see? And you can be certain that she didn't mean anything by it this time," the chief attempts to mediate. "On the other hand, I assure you she's always spoken of you in glowing terms."

Alexander: "Ay, and it was a bit of glowing terms she gave me last night, wasn't it!" He weighs the matter further in his mind; he is as crafty as the devil himself, the last word in strategem. "Well, we'll let those glowing terms of hers go for what they are worth—I'll stay on if you'll let me lock her out of the smokehouse."

The chief, failing utterly to comprehend: "Lock her out of the smokehouse?"

"Ay. Lock the door so she can't get in."

"But I thought she was quite indispensable there?"

"And that she is; I'll say nothing to deny that," admits

Alexander. "But there are many things I can do by myself and when it's time for her to step in with all that silly hocus-pocus about the colour of the product, the smell, the taste and all that—why, I suppose I can call her in."

The chief thinks this over: "Yes, I hardly imagine she will say a word against such an arrangement. I shall speak to her about it. I even believe that she will be grateful——"

Alexander returns to the garage. "Didn't take me long, eh?" he beams. He did the work of two, joked, carried in bags of cement, whistled and sang. And on the following day he was in the same excellent humour. Two whole days passed before he was again compelled to visit his net and perform his smokehouse duties.

And he held a conference with Gammelmoderen in regard to the precise and proper moment when he could lock himself in the smokehouse, with her at his side.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

AUGUST had heard nothing further concerning his money from Polden. The whole thing was possibly no more than a rumour, a mere exaggeration. Well, August was accustomed to disappointments in life. In the meantime he could continue to build roads and construct motor garages in the interest of progress.

At length, when so many days had gone by that August had lost both hope and angry regret, he was again reminded of the money by the arrival of a messenger from the magistrate's office.

The messenger was a young office employee who took his duties seriously. "I have in my pocket a letter from the magistrate," he began. "What is your name?"

August smiled and gave his name.

"That is correct!" But in order to avoid a mistake, he added: "Are you known by any other name here on the place?"

"Altmulig."

"That is also correct. Now this letter contains instructions for you to call at our office immediately to receive an important declaration. You must call within the next few days."

August realized in a flash that his money had at length arrived; he assumed a bit more of the manner of a great man, stretched forth his hand and said impatiently: "All right, let me have the letter! I can read it myself!"

The young man: "I can make the whole thing clear to you. For it was myself who wrote the letter. You are to call between the hours of nine and three when our office is open. You are to see me first; I shall then give you further instructions."

August became crafty at once, took out his notebook and began to write in it. The art of writing was not beyond him; he would show the young man that he knew the letters of the alphabet. Ay, and he even adjusted his *pince-nez* to give himself a more imposing appearance. "An important letter, did you say?" . . . He writes. . . .

"No, that is not what I said. An important declaration is what I said. There is a vast difference between the two. You are to call and receive an important declaration, I said."

August strikes a line through what he has written and enters the correction. "From the magistrate, did you say?" . . . He writes. . . . He glances at his watch. "I'll just note down the time that you came!" . . . He writes. . . .

"I didn't know that you were so experienced in matters of this nature," said the young man. "But I now observe that I have made a mistake. Possibly you are likewise aware of the subject of this important declaration?"

"It's not impossible that I do. I have so many interests. You see I have business all over."

"This has to do with an inheritance, or whatever it is, in Polden. That much at least I can advise you."

August flourishes his arm in a gesture of impatience. "I have so much property in Polden—a whole section of the town, a seining outfit, a factory—a large factory. You don't mean to tell me that the State has been sticking its fingers into that factory of mine, do you?"

"No, I can assure you that such is not the case. But more than that I am not at liberty to divulge."

"Between nine and three, did you say?" . . . He writes. . . . "And within a couple of days?" . . . He writes. . . .

The young man: "I shall herewith deliver the letter to you in person. It is already too late to call at our office today, as we shall soon be closed. But at some future date

will you be good enough to appear between the hours prescribed."

With that he turned and left, that young seedling of Norway's dear bureaucracy, that small piece of the dough of Norway's brand of statesmanship. . . .

Druggist Holm is the next to stop in at the garage. He greets August familiarly and asks jocularly: "Letter from the King?"

August flings the letter unopened over onto a bag of cement. "A mere note," he remarks superciliously. "It's only that I'm to call at the magistrate's office and pick up a sum of money."

"Money? In these days!"

"Well—I've been expecting it long enough. The Herr Druggist is out for a walk?"

"Oh I walk and I walk. Yes, I'm taking one of those idiotic walks of mine. Listen, August, I've a message for you from Fru Lund. She's been left so alone, you know, and she'd like to have you stop in at the house some time when you've a bit of time to spare."

"Glad to," says August.

"She's just had a telegram from the doctor and she would like to speak with you."

"I'll be there this evening."

"Thanks."

Druggist Holm hastens off. He walks for the sake of walking, walks briskly, leaves the whole of South Parish behind him, penetrates well into the neighbouring parish and at length turns homeward after several hours of roaming about. He is a perfect fiend for walking.

He is in the very centre of South Parish on his way home when he suddenly comes to a halt. Something happens to him; a feeling of sweetness sweeps over him, a rosy kindling of his every sense. Others would perhaps have noticed nothing, but this wanderer, Holm, stops

short, turns and for a short distance even retraces his steps. And upon his return home, as he was reaching for his patience cards, his heart was still aching from the delicate moment he had experienced.

The following day he called upon the postmaster's wife to tell her of this thing that had happened to him: he had been walking out in the country the day before through the section they call South Parish. On the way home he heard something and halted fair in his tracks. It had been a woman aloft on a knoll, a rustic housewife calling in her kine. "Soo-ah! Soo-ah!" she had called. Well, was that anything? No—yes, it had been something; a flood of harmony it had been, sheer loveliness poured forth into the sky, a thing of matchless beauty. He had turned and stared at the woman as she was descending from the knoll, and thin and poor she had appeared, a woman of something past thirty—Gina, her name was—Gina i Roten. He had walked home with her and exchanged a few words with her—she had both husband and children. Her family was not in distress; on the contrary, they owned a small farm with a mortgage, a few head of cattle. Her husband had been in the habit of entertaining at dances and gatherings with a whole repertory of ballads and ditties, but he had given up singing his songs after his recent baptism by a traveling evangelist. And for the same reason, his wife would no longer sing anything but hymns—though, for that matter, she knew but few secular songs. "But God help me, if her voice isn't a thing of beauty!" Holm exclaims. "She knew all the hymns by heart and she simply sat down and sang them to me with absolutely no thought of the time. And do you know the words that I spoke? 'Jesus Christ!' That's all I could find to say. Silly, wasn't it?"

"What was her voice?"

"Let me see—alto, I believe."

The postmaster's wife sat, as was her custom, with her head thrown back, her eyes partially closed—she was so

terribly near-sighted—but she was an interested listener and at length she said: “I must arrange to meet her.”

“Good. Gina i Roten. A little farm in South Parish. I told her that she and her family could become as ill as they liked, she could have all the medicine she needed from me free of charge. Hehehe! That was an odd thing to say, wasn’t it? But I meant it!”

“Is it far from here?”

“No. But can’t we go out and call on her some time together?”

“Yes, if you will promise to behave yourself.”

“What!” he cries. “In the middle of the main road!”

“No, I don’t trust you.”

“It’s a different matter here,” says Holm, glancing about.

“You are mad.”

“In my arms——”

“Keep still!”

“——through that door over there.”

“Hahaha, we wouldn’t get far that way! That’s the kitchen.”

“There, you see what it leads to when you keep things from me! I meant that door over there.”

“Keep still. You meant nothing. But *à propos* that woman: when shall we go out to her?”

“The very day and hour you yourself shall determine.”

“You must have an able pharmacist,” says Fru Hagen.

“Extremely able.”

“For you are away from your store day and night.”

“Not so at all! Now that the doctor is away I have to work like a dog. Especially on Mondays.”

“Why especially on Mondays?”

“People are coarse enough to make love over the holidays, for that’s when they have most time to spare. Then on the following Monday, they all come to me for medicine.”

“Silly!”

"Honour bright! They come to me for something to brace them up!"

"Well, what do you give them?"

"Well, what do you take yourself when you feel yourself spent—from such things?"

"I never feel spent—from such things, as you say."

"Nor I either—unfortunately!" says Holm. "So I really don't know what to give them. I've been giving them white sulphur salve. What is your opinion of that?"

"What—to rub on oneself?"

"No, they take it internally."

"Oh, you're impossible!" says Fru Hagen, shrieking with laughter.

"Yes, for you see there's a bit of arsenic in it, a drug I'm not supposed to dispense without a doctor's prescription."

"We could go out and call on your woman today, if you like."

"God bless you, sweet lady, thanks!" beams Holm. "If you only could know how sweetly you said that—your voice!—the golden tones of muted strings——"

"I have a pupil from one to two. Then we have lunch. We could start out around three."

"How splendid, how splendid! I never knew anyone like you to ascertain the exact hours when I am free!"

"Hahaha!"

"It's no laughing matter. Your words have already struck home and made an impression upon me. *Hjertet blir saa stort derved* (My heart o'erflows because of it), as it says in the song. I know of no one quite like you—sweet and lovable, charming and seductive——"

"No faults?"

"Ah yes, you have one fault."

"What is it?"

"You are cold."

The lady remains silent.

"Seductive but cold."

"But what are you, then? A phrase-maker. Just that. You make a fine show of your depravity, you bristle and pretend. But it's all artifice with you."

"The devil you say!"

"So. And now you must go. My first pupil will be here shortly."

Holm: "Did you mean what you said?"

"Some of it."

"See here now, Fru Hagen—you ought to have waited for me instead of coupling up with that old stamp-seller of yours."

"Mm—no—I'd rather have him than you."

"The devil you say!"

"Yes, I surely would."

"All right, then I shan't go with you to call on Gina i Roten."

"Oh, I'm certain you will."

"No sir, I won't. Now hear me again: don't you suppose I might be able to make some headway with Marna?"

"With whom?"

"Marna. Marna Theodorsdatter of Segelfoss Manor."

"Why, I'm sure I don't know."

"She is exactly the type I admire—a most promising girl, of large, superb proportions. I really ought to marry some day, don't you think?"

"Of course you should. You, as we others. You might try your luck with Marna."

"You do not advise me against it?"

"Oh no, not exactly."

"No, it is you that I love!"

"Now you must go."

"Well, I'll be back for you at three."

They started off, the druggist with his guitar on a broad silk band slung over his shoulder, Fru Hagen on

the arm of her husband. Oh yes, the postmaster had taken the afternoon off and was to accompany them. "Do you think I can ever be rid of her!" he said. But Holm must have wondered to himself just who could ever be rid of whom! It annoyed him keenly to be obliged to include the postmaster on this jaunt—that fellow, that detestable individual, he prevented him from walking beside the lady and exchanging his idle banter with her. But the weather was fine, field and meadow bloomed and breathed fragrance into the breeze, the birds were twittering, the foliage trees spread forth their broadest leaves, and not a person to be seen on the road.

Well, but Postmaster Hagen was hardly a man to be overlooked. Slightly under middle-height but solidly built and muscular, intelligent of face, not bad looking. He uttered no contentious chatter, but he uttered no imbecilities, either.

"Suppose we appear at the doctor's," he said. "Fru Lund is so lonely these days."

"What in heaven's name should we do there?"

"You could play and Alfhild could sing."

"And you?"

"I could pass the hat."

His suggestion gained no adherents. Nor had the postmaster apparently expected that it should; he had probably spoken up merely to prove he had a voice.

"Mysterious about the doctor having had his eye torn clean out," he said.

Holm caught him up with a product of his own imagination: "Was there really anything mysterious about it? The doctor is returning home from a sick call; he takes a short cut through the woods, runs into difficulties and a dry branch claws out his eye. What if it were something like that?"

"Well, I suppose it was something like that. But has he had himself cared for in Bodø?"

"No. He wired that he would have to go on to Trondhjem. No doubt he has already left."

There was no further mention of the affair. Nevertheless the postmaster apparently still felt called upon to make conversation: "If only we don't scare off the people we are going to see. There are three of us, you know."

Holm: "Yes, and three makes quite a crowd."

"Well, I can just as well remain outside."

"You'll do nothing of the kind!" puts in his wife, clinging to his arm.

The postmaster nodded: "*Dit Ord min Lov, Alfchild!* (Your word my law, Alfchild!)."

"No, you mean '*Dit Ord mit Lov!*' (Your word my leave), don't you?"

Holm squirmed at the sound of such nonsense, swung his guitar across his breast and began thrumming the strings.

The postmaster: "I believe it's done me good to come along today. Usually I sit doubled up in my office all day long, sucking on my pipe and gossiping with my accounts. Out here there is fresh air."

"Gossiping with your accounts?" asked Holm. "What does that mean?"

"That is to say, I sit there talking to myself."

"That must be boring indeed," Holm flung at him.

The postmaster accepted the remark good-naturedly. "Oh no," he said. "I keep myself most pleasantly amused. I talk much better when I'm alone than when I'm in company with others. Thus it is with all lonely ones."

"Do you make your husband feel lonely, then, Fru Hagen?"

"I am lonely myself," she replied.

The postmaster: "Yes, that you are. But you artists and musicians, really you do not find it so terrible to be alone—you have your art—you have your songs, your guitar."

"But you sketch, don't you!"

"What's that, does he sketch?" asked Holm.

"Of course, he sketches. But he is furious with me now for telling on him.

"Why, no—I'm by no means furious. But you promised me you would never talk nonsense about it."

"Oh, so you sketch?" the druggist repeated. "I never knew anything about that."

"I most certainly do not sketch. But if it were possible to make a living at it, I believe I might turn to sculpture."

"Hahaha!" laughed his wife, apparently proud of him, and squeezing his arm.

They had arrived at the farm. Not a child to be seen, not a dog. Silence over everything. The woman of the house is observed sitting in the house, the upper part of her body quite nude. She is working over a white garment held across her knees. Her breasts are loose and pendulous.

The party halts abruptly.

"What are we stopping for?" Fru Hagen asks and quickly adjusts her *pince-nez*. "Good heavens——!" she says.

The druggist: "What are we stopping for? Apparently the lady in there is studying entomology first-hand from her undershirt."

"No no no! Surely she is sewing on it, she is mending her garment."

"One should hold honest poverty in respect," says the postmaster quietly.

"Look, she's seen us," his wife observes.

"Yes," replies the druggist. "But she seems in no hurry to crawl back into her clothes. I must say, I didn't know folks were so completely out of the world in this section. If I had——"

"If you had? What are you mumbling about? See, there come the children."

"Well well, and even they look just like human beings—even they."

"How can you talk so cynically?" Fru Hagen asks. "You who have kept open hotel for hungry children?"

"What's that——!"

"Oh, I've heard all about it."

"What the devil did I have to do with that!" snapped the druggist. "It was at the hotel, the proprietor——"

"Go in and see if we are welcome!" she replies.

They were welcome and she and the druggist stepped into the house. The postmaster, however, preferred to remain outside for a time.

He began walking across the open country. He had seen a man cleaning out a ditch—Karel, the man from Roten. He was barefoot in water and slime clear up to his knees.

"Bless the work!" said the postmaster in greeting.

"Thanks to you!" replied Karel, glancing up. He had a pleasant face and seemed ready to smile at the slightest thing. There was nothing about him to indicate that he had become serious-minded after his recent baptismal experience. "But I don't know how blessed it is," he said. "This drain gets bigger for me every year that goes by. And in autumn season there's enough water here to turn mill-wheels."

The postmaster turned his gaze up the slope in the direction of a certain pond, a regular little lake. "Can't you drain off the water up there?" he asked.

"Ay, mercy! And if I ever can find the means to do it, you'll see it as dry as the floor of a room."

"How deep is it?"

"Now that it's summer, it's just about up to my knees in the deepest place. And fine fertile soil, too, on the bottom."

"You must drain off that water, Karel."

"Ay, well I must that!"

"That will make a splendid addition to this farm of yours."

"Ay, it will so. But I'm none to afford it just now," said Karel, a gentle smile on his face. "And I doubt me how long I can work out with the whole place here. That's all to do with how soon the lawyer will be taking it away from me."

"Lawyer Pettersen?"

"Ay. He's the bank now, too, as it is."

"Do you owe the bank money?"

"Ay, for so it seems. But not so much, when you come to it. Give me two, three fine years at Lofoten, so I'll clear the place of the worst of it!" And Karel almost laughed as he said this.

The tones of a voice floated across the field to them from the cottage in the distance. Karel put his head on one side and listened. "She's singing," he said.

The postmaster explained that his wife and Druggist Holm from town had stopped in at the cottage to hear Gina's voice. The druggist had brought along his guitar.

"He brought a guitar, say you?" asked Karel, his interest aroused at once. He climbed out of the ditch, wiped the slime from his feet on a tuft of grass and said: "That's something for me to hear!" And the music-loving Karel i Roten, born and reared in the direst of poverty, but the ablest ballad-singer in South Parish, he left his work and hastened home simply to hear a man play the guitar. No, there was absolutely nothing about Karel to indicate that his second baptism had made a pious man of him.

Greetings all round in the cottage. "Aren't you ashamed to show yourself barefoot like that!" said Gina. "Ay," answered Karel quite absently. He stationed himself as near the guitar as he could, paid little or no heed to his guests, and when the druggist began to play, Karel was unable to take away his eyes.

"Come, Gina, you must sing now!" someone begged.

And Gina raised the roof from that humble cottage again and again with the glorious tones of her voice. Karel stood bent forward the entire time and, with a broad smile on his face, followed every movement of the druggist's fingers. When invited to try the guitar, he accepted it without hesitation and immediately began thrumming the strings. He smiled and thrummed, smiled and thrummed; and in truth he was so thoroughly musical that, in spite of his many mistakes, he was able to produce not a few chords which would have done credit to one who had studied the instrument.

The druggist left the guitar in Karel's hands when the party departed for home.

Along the way they encountered August. He was standing outside the blacksmith shop and was again having trouble with the smith who seemed unable to perform the simplest task. This time it was a number of garage appliances, the steel so brittle it could stand no weight at all. The fellow had roasted his metal. August was fussing and fuming.

In passing, the druggist asked: "Did you call on Fru Lund?"

August nodded curtly.

"And have you also been to the magistrate's office?"

August, grief-stricken and indisposed, merely looked at him.

"After your money, I mean to say. After that million of yours. Would it pay me, I mean, to assault you and go through your pockets?"

August shook his head. . . .

No, he had received no million. The magistrate had no money to hand him. That "important declaration" had been nought save a letter from Paulina in Polden in which she declared that she would *not* turn over a certain bank-book—that for August! In the first place, he had nothing

to do with this money, as he had made over to her, Paulina, everything he had left behind in Polden, including whatever he might win in a lottery. She had a document signed by two witnesses to show for it. In the second place, August could come to Polden and get the money himself; what guarantee did she have that he was the man he made himself out to be?

That devil of a Paulina, as like herself today as ever, capable, keen as a whip, honest to a fault. He could see her in his mind's eye—old now, but still with a white ribbon about her throat, a pearl ring on her finger.

The magistrate was most desirous of helping August; that he was, for he was really a kind-hearted fellow. But there was some hitch in regard to that money in Polden. Had the title to it been assigned to another?

"Ay," August answered. But that had been anything but the right thing to say; he knew Paulina, knew that she would not wish to retain a single *øre* of any money which might be his—that had been only something she had said.

Would August care then to go north after the money himself?

No. In addition to everything else, it would be impossible for him to drop the many undertakings he was engaged in on behalf of the Consul—the construction of the road, in particular. He had many men working for him.

But could he then identify himself by means of certain papers so that the lady, Paulina, could feel herself amply protected?

That would be worse.

What, no papers?

No.

But wasn't it true that Doctor Lund and his wife had recognized August as an old Poldener?

To be sure! He could certainly hope that they had! Many a glass of grog had he drunk with them there in

their house. And when the doctor and his wife had it in mind to invite someone in for the evening, who should be the first one they thought of if not August? And he could easily have gone to the doctor and his wife and right then and there secured from them a sworn statement that he was the man he said he was. But the doctor, he was away now, had gone down to Trondhjem, and no one knew when he was coming back.

August had again been pitifully unlucky. Again he would have to wait, wait, wait. . . .

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

NO, Segelfoss was surely not flourishing. Something must have been standing in the way. Possibly the town was unfavourably located, possibly there was too little farming enterprise there, the earth too lean, or at least too poorly cultivated. It must have been something like that. Nothing seemed to thrive and grow fat and bloated there—not a single human being whose eyes were all but grown together with fat, not a single farm creature which appeared as something of a monstrosity because of overfeeding. No. The cattle were let out to pasture every morning and at eventide they would return with their bellies not even half-filled; each tuft of grass and the verdancy of each brookside had already been nibbled clean by the sheep, and the cows were compelled to seek a diet of heather and leaves, the result being the poorest of milk. These were obvious conditions. But a good five or six miles back in the mountains behind South Parish lay vast stretches of lush moorland, a green paradise for sheep and goats. There was a legend to the effect that Willatz Holmsen had once kept flocks at graze there in summer.

And the home fishing, what did this do for the parish round about? Folk living fair at the edge of the sea might occasionally bring home a string of haddock and coalfish, enough for a single boiling, but with none left over for the following day. Ay, such was the home fishing. And fishermen from town might get together a party and row the long distance to a certain bay off North Parish where they could spear flounders against the white sandy bottom. True. But this would prevent them from slumbering peacefully through the long light night and this would

require that they have a meal of dried meat and coffee at two o'clock, so how could the spearing of flounder be considered in any way profitable? And wouldn't they have to make up their lost sleep by resting throughout the entire following day?

No, Segelfoss was without all reasonable means of making a living.

But Gordon Tidemand, he wriggled and lived on and prospered—he was a great man and even a consul. He did mad things because of his urgent thirst for activity, such as building that country home of his and that road which went up the mountain. And he did other things out of sheer adolescent foolishness, such as investing in that shining motor boat in which to dash out to meet incoming steamers—what need had he for that trim little craft when in a few moments that very steamer would be lying alongside his own pier? There lay the motor boat now, a toy of brass and mahogany, a thing of useless beauty.

All this. But Gordon Tidemand was in any event wide awake and, amongst other things, he conducted a highly profitable salmon-packing industry. More, he had taken this enterprise seriously and had sent one of his able store clerks south through Helgeland as his traveling representative. Naturally, he had equipped the fellow regally, first of all with a handsome new suit of clothes, a watch and a gold chain, next with the most modern of sample cases, brass corners and all. All this had cost a pretty penny, to be sure, but the lad was already justifying the outlay by the orders he was sending back—he was apparently a born traveling salesman.

But otherwise Segelfoss was utterly dead, a centre of sheer stupidity.

Some folk had already begun to scowl at the Consul's road leading up the mountain side. This work of the hand of man was certainly a creditable embellishment to the landscape, but it had already become the subject of much

muttering and shaking of heads. Who could have thought such a thing possible? Naturally, the talk had started up in North Parish where folk were most backward in knowledge and the will to progress, and where superstition and a primitive fear of the Lord took the place of science and culture. This new attitude found its original expression in the words of aged men and women and this in turn might have been inspired by certain dark words uttered by Aase. "There's no peace for mouse or sparrow," Aase had said. "They are digging and blasting away a mountain the Lord created."—"Ay, isn't it true what you say!" nodded the old ones up in North Parish.

And so they all undertook to discuss this thing, and time flashed back and forth in those old grey heads, with no order to the passing years: the Franco-Prussian War; the night of the bloody aurora; the fate of Doctor Paul Føyn; the prophet Jeremiah's prediction of the comet which lost its tail on an island in the sea and caused an earthquake—and everything eventually led back to those words of Aase's concerning the Consul's new road and how it was disturbing all nature.

For there were folk who dwelt in the mountains, underworld folk, supernatural beings who had their own farms and cattle, rich and peaceful gnomes who would harm no earthly creature if they themselves were left in peace. And this bedlam of pounding and shouting and blasting and yelling which had begun last spring and which had kept up ever since, what had it been but a plague and a nuisance for the underworld folk, so great that they had probably been obliged to move on to some other mountain. And this would be of no profit to the ones who lived on the earth; the aged of North Parish could still recall what their parents had told them of the creatures of the underworld when the first telegraph lines had been set up with no end of confusion of horses and men. Ay, and on the very ship which had arrived with all the telegraph

wire, an iron block had fallen from the rigging and killed a sailor on deck. He had even been buried in Hamarøy churchyard. But that wasn't all; never before in all the world had there been such thunder and lightning and storms of wind and rain throughout Nordland as there had been that year, and Willumsen 'pun Lian had had the roof of his barn blown off—maybe they couldn't remember that year! And his new roof had to be chained down with two heavy iron chains as anyone could see today—just go and look! And is there anyone who has forgotten how lean the fishing was at Lofoten that winter, so that it couldn't even be likened to an average year, but was really perfectly awful. And then with spring, it was ten times worse—ankle deep snow on Midsummer's Eve and the grain unable to ripen. And that was the very summer when the underworld folk had been disturbed in the south and had moved here to the mountains of Segelfoss. For here it was so fine with deep ravines all over, so that it was easy for them to get in and they didn't have to crawl right into the very heart of the mountain, which is a hardship even for them. Folk here had stumbled upon them when they were arriving with all their horses and their vast herds of cattle, and they had marvelled to see so many cows, sleek and fat as any shoal of herring. This one and that one of the parents of these old folk had met them—Aron of Staurholla had met them and he had told more than once of the great event. To be sure, when he lay on his death-bed and had had the pastor to visit him, he had said he had never seen them at all and that the whole thing had been nought but a lie, but that had been because he was so near death then that he had taken leave of most of his senses. Another who had met them that same day had been Ingeborg of Utleia. She was knitting a pair of red and grey stockings and was just about finished with the second stocking when an underworld woman came to her and asked her for the

stocking. "Ay, and may you live to wear it long!" said Ingeborg. "And won't you have the other stocking, too?" Ay, and that she would, said the underworld woman. And good luck had followed Ingeborg to the end of her days because of it, for she rose to grand heights of wealth and position in Vesteraalen, married a man, and then his brother, and inherited what they both left when they died.

"Ay, so it may go," said an old man of North Parish. "So it may go when the underworld folk are treated with a wee mite of kindness and charity—they pay back a hundred-fold! But now as it is, when our people are pounding and shooting worse than wildmen and savages up in the mountains belonging to others, and close up one ravine after another with walls and ways for a road, ay, only the Lord in Heaven can say what we who live on the earth have in store for us in the way of punishment. Now if I was as young as today I am old, I don't know what I would do. For it's leaving these mountains they are, remember it as I say, and if only someone might be lucky enough to stand in their way and hold out some little gift to them, never would he want for good luck and help in this world from that day on. And it wouldn't have to be such a grand gift to be giving them either, for the underworld folk, they have the power to see into a man's heart. And it wouldn't have to be a coin no matter how bright it might be, for the underworld folk, they have their own money and they have no use for ours. How was it, wasn't a strange coin found in the till at the store in Segelfoss? And that was on the very same day that a man from the other world had been to the store to buy a bit of tobacco of the same kind that we here on the earth find to use——"

A youth comes out with the explanation that this purchaser of tobacco had not been an underworld man but a man from Germany—one of the German musicians who had played in the town.

"Where do you get your knowledge from?" asks the old man with a touch of annoyance. "I have mine from that Martin who is himself a clerk in the store."

"Ay, but that Martin, he went in to the Consul with the coin and asked him about it. And the Consul, he took one look at it and said it was money from Germany."

"Ay ay, there you have it! But it is so that we others in our own wretched lives, we too have learned a few things. It's you young lads that study in books and newspapers who know it all and won't believe plain talk. It was my own grandfather as came home with a load of wood from the forest one night when there was a moon and stars. He unhitched his horse and propped the shafts of his sledge straight up in the air. Then he went in. In the house there were two strangers sitting there. They were astronomers and they were going up in the Segelfoss mountains the next day to look for a star they had lost track of. 'Tonight we'll be having a snowfall!' said my grandfather. 'What makes you think so?' asked the two astronomers, just like doubting Thomas in the Scripture, and they pointed out through the window at the moonlight. 'I know it by that horse of mine,' said my grandfather. 'For he shook himself twice in the shafts before I could get him unhooked!' And excuse me, if it didn't turn out even better than he said, and in the morning he was mighty glad as he had turned up the shafts of his sledge, for it was buried under the snow and otherwise he might never have found it!"

"He'd have found it in the spring, at any rate," a young lad whispered.

"Go on, tell us more!" said another.

The old man, this time downright annoyed: "No, what should I go on and tell you for? You know everything so much better than I do. You're just like those two astronomers—they knew everything there was to know about heaven and earth."

"Well, but couldn't they go up the mountain on account of the snow, those astronomers?"

"Ho, maybe they went up the mountain! No, but they found the lost star just the same."

"How did they find it?"

"Ay, they looked in the almanac more carefully and there it was all the time, there along with the rest of the stars!"

A grand sensation there in the room. "Well, that beats all!"—"Why, mercy sakes alive!"

The old man, encouraged by the appreciation his tale had called forth, became mild again and continued: "The Consul should perhaps have looked more carefully at that piece of money," he said to clinch his point.

"Maybe so. Ay, that he should. Tell us more!"

"No. There's no reason why I should go on talking and telling you things. But there's one thing sure: if I had my youth back, I should certainly be out looking after my interests when the underworld folk are moving!"

The question arises as to what might be the most appropriate gifts to offer them.

"Almost anything. It wouldn't make any difference what it was so long as it was either some kind of shining ornament or a collar or even a couple of tallow candles. And I would hold it out to them in both hands, like this, and not be afraid. But 'tis also true that I would go to the altar first so they couldn't use any of their power on me."

When the old man fell silent, the young people began gossiping amongst themselves.

"That Benjamin, he says he has seen them."

"Seen underworld folk? Where?"

"Just this autumn, it was—one evening when he was walking home from South Parish. All at once he saw a woman standing in the road in front of him. I said it must have been that Cornelia, but he said he was just coming from Cornelia's place."

"What became of the woman?"

"She fluttered off into the woods."

"Well, then it was that Cornelia. I'd be willing to bet on it. For Benjamin, he's anyway a bit afraid of the dark."

"Well, I wish as I was that Benjamin! He's had steady work there at the Consul's, could earn his bread week after week for two weeks. And there was money in that, even if the job is over now."

True, Benjamin's job was now over; the garage was finished and the car itself had arrived; both the chief and August had taken their driving tests with an official from the south and had earned their certificates with no small amount of glory to themselves. As Benjamin was no longer needed, August went up to him and told him he was through. And they parted company without the slightest sign of friendliness on August's part; no, it seemed more as though the lad had been given the chuck.

It had in truth been decidedly pleasant work for August whilst creating this home for the car, this motor boudoir with its walls panelled off in steel and cement, and he had received the ablest type of assistance from Benjamin, this clever little lad from North Parish, this sweetheart of Cornelia's before whom he could strut and put on airs. But it was natural that he should dislike the young man and, though Cornelia was as inaccessible to him as the stars of heaven, August was forever pouncing upon Benjamin with sarcasm born of his jealousy.

"You have a farm, haven't you? Then why don't you go to work and get married?" August asked with all the spite that was in him.

"The farm isn't mine," answered Benjamin. "The farm, it belongs to my father."

"A filthy little dungheap of a farm, too, I've been told. Like all the rest of the farms in these parts!"

"No, it's a good farm, I can tell you."

"Hm, I suppose you grow oranges on it?"

"And a pretty farm," says Benjamin, ignoring the remark. "You must come out and see it some time."

"As though I had nothing better to do!" snorted August.

"We have four cows and a horse. There aren't many who have more."

August delivered himself of a further snort. "Say, I've been on farms in South America where they had three million head of cattle like yours."

"Ay, I'd never think of doubting you!"

"But the point is," said August, "you ought to get married to some girl up in that North Parish of yours—get married and have it over with."

Benjamin: "She isn't from North Parish, she is from South Parish."

August, slowly: "Hm—that's nothing to me!"

"What's that?"

"I said you're through working for me. You don't need to come back tomorrow."

"Oh, so we're all through here?"

"Ay, do you hear!"

"All right," said Benjamin. "There's nothing to be said about that. But if you have anything else for me to do later on, you can send for me."

August: "I'll have nothing else for you to do, count on that! What was I going to say? No, I can't understand what you're waiting for. You're old enough. When I was your age I was a widow-man for the second time. Ay, and here you stand. I don't suppose you've even got a girl."

"Oh yes, I have, you can be sure. I've a girl I'm in love with and who is in love with me, as well. It's the girl they call Cornelia."

"Well, what's that got to do with me!"

"What did you say?"

"I said are you ever together with her? Do you dance

with her? When you go to a Christmas dance, does she sit on your knee?"

"You act so grouchy with me," says Benjamin.

"And I suppose you drink coffee out of the same cup, you two?"

Benjamin smiling: "We might, sometimes. Why do you ask me that?"

"These Christmas dances, they're the work of the devil himself. You never see me at one!"

"But in your younger days, I suppose you used to go?"

"No," said August. "I used to think myself too good for such goings-on. My younger days—! Say, I'm not so old right now, so get that into your head! You think that just because you're young! But you should see me in one of those enormous dance halls abroad. I was at a grand ball just before I came here. And I was such a wonderful dancer, no one else dared to step out on the floor. Tell that to that Cornelia of yours with my compliments!"

"Do you know her?"

"Say, what are you standing around here wasting my time for! Didn't I tell you to go?"

Benjamin: "All right. But you say such grouchy things to me. No, that I should get me a girl there in North Parish, when I already have a girl down in South Parish!"

"I'll think about it," said August.

Ho, so many ways of wasting a man's time! A mere youth from the country district, a mere stripling for all his full beard, he thought he was privileged to stand around talking over his love affairs with his boss! Unheard of in countries abroad. . . .

August was called into conference by his chief. They were to go out on a road inspection tour. A main road ran through the centre of town, a road connecting parish with parish. In spite of the usual ruts it was passable, but it was the Consul's thought to discover how far north

and how far south he could drive that car of his for the purpose of astounding the natives.

The Consul sits at the wheel. He is a skillful driver, no mistake; just another of the sciences he has mastered abroad. Folk scamper out of the way in such utter confusion that the occupants of the machine are indeed amused. Oh that Consul!

The road passes over the river in the vicinity of the falls by means of a stone bridge, ancient and solidly built—two arches and an iron railing. This must be the place where they come and baptise each other! August muses as they are crossing the bridge, and possibly he groans inwardly at the thought of all the swinishness committed in the name of the Holy Ghost. When they have emerged from the droning roar of the falls, he turns to the Consul and says: "It's a pity about that big mill standing there unused!"

"It didn't pay," the chief replies.

"Maybe it would pay as a factory."

"I don't know. What kind of a factory?"

"Oh—a packing house and tannery. And maybe a woollen mill besides. Three in one."

The chief halts the car, thinks for a moment and says: "But there aren't enough sheep here to do anything with."

"You could have as many sheep here as there are stars in the sky."

"You think so?"

"Ay," continues August. "As many sheep as there are sands on the seashore."

"But they would have to eat."

August points to the summits and replies: "Up there lie mile upon mile of grazing lands. Thousands of creatures could live up there. And here's a good thing to consider: no wolves, no bears, no lynxes or anything else you can mention. A single shepherd would be all you'd need."

The Consul is silent for a long time, then speaks. "The

mill is certainly falling to pieces," he remarks. "I haven't been up there since childhood." Then suddenly the Consul consults his watch, as though it had suddenly occurred to him to make for the mill at once. But no, he again starts up the car.

There was an excellent road as far as the church and for quite some distance beyond, but at length it became more and more narrow and at length broke up into a number of forks leading off to divers farms and cottages. They were obliged to drive slowly and carefully and at length to stop entirely in order to make way for a load of hay—the horses stood up on their hind legs and the lad on the load had all he could do to control them.

But August continued to brood over a certain plan; a scheme involving a factory of one type or another. To begin with it had been but a sudden notion, a wild fancy which on the spur of the moment had popped into that active brain of his, a notion he had hastily cloaked with three-fold possibility. Quite off-hand, he inquired: "Does the Herr Consul know who owns the grazing lands at the top?"

"No. The Province perhaps. Possibly the title is in the Crown."

"Then it's easy! They're as good as yours already!"

"Mine? No," says the Consul, shaking his head. "I have no use for them. However, I've heard it said that one of the old owners of Segelfoss once maintained a large flock on the mountain. But I simply can not understand what he did to feed them during the winter months."

"He probably had roving flocks."

"Possibly. But even outlers must have food."

August was silent for a time. He realized that the question of a factory was still somewhat vague in the Consul's mind: he therefore decided to establish himself as a man of reputation now as on previous occasion—for this had he been given that nimble brain of his.

The chief remarked: "You are a man with ideas, Altmulig. And it is clear that we ought to start up something here in Segelfoss. But I'm afraid I lack the capacity."

But to the same degree the Consul's cooled, August's enthusiasm kindled. "Why, all we'd have to do would be to turn the flocks loose up there!" he objected.

"Yes, for the summer," said the chief.

August now took refuge in his manifold worldly experience. "I've seen myself how sheep can pull through winter and bad weather both in Africa and Australia. Why, that's nothing at all for a sheep. No, it's the summer dry spell that kills them off like flies."

"But we should have snow to contend with here, don't you see that?"

"Oh, I've seen it done here in Norway, too."

The chief remained silent.

And now it is possible that August went a bit too far. "Ay," he said, "maybe the Herr Consul doesn't believe me, but as true as I'm sitting here, I once had the whole of the Hardanger moorland covered with my flocks."

The chief brought the car to a standstill. "What's that?" he asked. "I've been around a good bit both at home and abroad and I've never either heard or read of that!"

"I could have bought the entire moor, but I leased it instead."

"You had flocks there?"

"A few thousand. Only ten thousand."

The Consul tried his best to comprehend, did all he could to accompany August on this wild flight of his. "But I don't see how," he said,—“when the autumn—the winter feeding——”

"Oh, in the fall I slaughtered them off. Shipped meat all over the world. Perhaps the Herr Consul didn't read about that, either?"

"No. And how—well, after you had slaughtered off

your flock, you had no sheep to begin the next year with, did you?"

"No, Herr Consul—you see I had to leave just then. I couldn't keep on with it, for I had been called to South America to take charge of an important piece of work."

The Consul was silent. Absent-mindedly, he started the car.

August was likewise silent. He realized that his yarn had not been believed, but this fact was of no great concern to him—he had never in his life cared a fig whether folk believed what he told them or not. Nor did he regret his exaggeration; he refused to take back a word. It was his mission in life to father all forms of progress and development, and he had left behind him desolation in one form or another wherever he had gone. He was ignorant and therefore innocent; a warrior in the cause for human emancipation even were the result to prove meaningless and destructive in the end. Were we not to keep up with the times? Were we to be the laughing stock of the entire world? The times, the spirit of modernity had its eye on him and found in him a man it could use. Yes, the modern age had good use for him; he was a voyager, a man who had sailed the seven seas and who was rags both inside and out, a man whose mind found no room for skepticism—or conscience—but a man who was keen of head and able of hand. The age had made of him its missionary. He had heard the call and he was on fire with the will to modernize and develop, even at the expense of destroying all semblance of order. He was as abnormally mendacious as the new age itself, but as he was ignorant, he was innocent. And now he was old. But he still had breath in his body. The Lord had allowed him to live.

"I'm looking for a place to turn round," said the Consul. "This is as far as we can get."

The people of the countryside had turned out in great numbers to witness the return trip of the car; the rumour

must have spread from farm to farm, from cottage to cottage. Ay, here now was a spectacle—not a comet, to be sure, but a carriage that went of itself. Oh that Consul! The only pity was that he could not whizz along the road as motorists did abroad. On this rural lane in Norway his speed was such that not even a hen took fright.

As they were crossing the bridge for the second time, August suddenly remarked: "That mill could even be used as an iodine factory."

"What's that——?"

"Ay, as an iodine factory."

The devil and all lay in that old Altmulig and those factories of his; there, he had got another flash of inspiration through his brain!

"Yes," said the Consul. "Iodine is certainly an excellent product. Something they use in medicine."

"And here we have no end of raw stuff to make it out of—whole heaps of seaweed right outside our very doors—God's gift simply going to waste."

"That's true. We use a bit of seaweed as fertilizer for our soil, but otherwise I don't suppose we make all the use of it we might."

"All we need is a few machines," said August.

The Consul asked: "Have you worked in that field, as well?"

"Some!" August now felt urged to make amends for his earlier exaggerations. "I wasn't a foreman or anything like that. I was simply an ordinary day labourer."

"While I think of it," said the Consul. "We must fence off those two dangerous steeps at the side of that mountain road of ours."

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

DOCTOR LUND and his son had returned home. They were both entirely well now. That is, the boy was still obliged to use a cane for a time, and the doctor had a glass eye.

That devil's own Aase! It had been impossible to save the eye. Her filthy fingers had created an infection and this had ruined the eye completely.

It wasn't so bad, though. The glass eye was just as lovely as the good one. The only trouble with it was, it could not roll about like a real eye and, of course, it was somewhat lacking in fire. No one else could observe any change in the doctor's appearance, though he himself felt poorer and somewhat despoiled. That finicky man, he could not get it out of his mind; it had worked on his nerves, so he came right out with it to his wife, as though to make light of his misfortune. "Well, I don't suppose you will want me any longer now!" he said. And when she laughed to hear such talk, he carried the conversation a bit further; it must be extremely disgusting to feel oneself attached to a man with so terrific a blemish and, beautiful as she was, she would certainly have no difficulty at all in finding herself another man!

"Here, here! Have you taken clean leave of your mind!" she howled joyfully. "I'd have you if you were blind!"

So 'tis an ill wind which blows no one some good! As the result of his misfortune Doctor Lund became an entirely changed man, fonder of his wife than ever before, truly in love now, as jealous as a youth of twenty. What difference did it make now if she were from Polden, from

the poorest of homes, from the simplest of parents? A new life had begun for this pair: affectionate embraces, mad nights as bride and groom, laughter ringing through the house. And Fru Esther never again found it necessary to steal up to her corner in the attic to weep. That blessed creature, Aase!

August called on them.

"See here, August!" said the doctor. "Step over to the light and stick your finger in this damaged eye of mine!"

August went to the light, examined the two eyes carefully and was tactful enough to stick his finger in the good eye.

Nor was the doctor the least bit annoyed by this good-hearted mistake; he cried out, laughing: "You old rascal, you're in league with Esther here! I ought to show you both the door!"

August pardoned himself on the grounds that he had been without his glasses, and this sounded reasonable enough. But the doctor was, nevertheless, naïvely pleased over the affair; if his blemish could not be detected without spectacles and a magnifying glass, it could not be such a terrific blemish, after all, could it?

"And see here now, August; I've been given to understand that you would like us to testify to the fact that you're the man you say you are! Well well, that I shall be more than happy to do. Sit down a moment, have another cup of coffee!" The doctor began to write. "Come, Esther, you must sign this, too!"

After this, they sat down and had a long and friendly chat. The doctor's son entered the room with his cane. "Yes, here's the other cripple," said the doctor. "But he's all right now, too."

"And who's the first?" asked August, innocently.

"You know, that's me!"

"You're not to talk like that, do you hear!" cried his wife, clapping her hand over his mouth.

The doctor: "Can you ever understand women, August? Now look at Esther—she's never before been as nice to me as she is now. No talk of slapping and scratching each other now!"

Moonshine, fiddle-faddle, but domestic happiness, full mutual accord, peace in the breast. . . .

When August was leaving, Esther stepped outside with him. "What do you think, August, just what do you think, I ask you!" she breathed, enraptured. "Have you ever seen such a change? I can't feel my feet on the ground any more. It seems so good for me to be alive now!"

"You deserve all the good things anyone can think of!" said August.

"He's been entirely different ever since he came back," she continued. "I haven't thought of Polden even once—I've no need to any more!"

"Ugh, Polden!" groaned August, attempting to blot out all thought of that vile place. . . .

Oh, but August was originally from Polden himself, and it would seem that he was not to be entirely quit of his native heath. He was expecting a sum of money from there. The identification signed by the doctor and his wife was despatched and Paulina was prompt to reply. And firm she was, that Paulina: the least August could do would be to come himself. There was an old and detailed account to present to him; out of the original lottery prize of twenty thousand German marks, she had paid off August's debts, but more than half of the original amount had been left over and this residue, in the course of time, had more than doubled itself. She demanded that August should come to Polden so that he might receive an accurate accounting. If not, he could forget about the entire matter—just as he liked!

"In truth I am not surprised at the woman," said the

judge. "She seems to me to be decidedly salt of the earth."

"Salt!" exclaimed August. "Say, you couldn't find a straighter, honester, more religious lump of salt on this side of the Atlantic. I'll say that much for her, I will!"

The magistrate was still anxious to help him and said: "What if you were to write her a letter yourself and explain that you have so much work to do down here that you simply can't get away? That's an idea worth trying."

Ay, perhaps it was an idea worth trying, but one day after another slipped by and August put off writing the letter. No, he simply could not bring himself to do it. In the first place, how was such a singular letter to be put together? It wasn't like a business letter—date, at hand and contents noted, in regard to, beg to advise, yours very truly—no, it was in truth a begging letter, a humble request for a sum of money he had given away with a mere flourish of his arm. The long and short of it was, he wrote no letter at all. All right then, you can keep the money, Paulina! He could live his remaining time on earth without it, as he had before, and farewell forever. Yours truly, August. . . . But no, it was a crying shame to be losing so large a sum of money just at this time when he could certainly put it to good use in one way or another. Didn't that Paulina have any feeling left in her breast for her old friend and childhood companion? Hm. . . .

Well, perhaps he might send her a wire. An old vanity he had preserved from the days of his youth. Who could be bothered writing a long and tedious letter when the whole thing could be said in a telegram?

He seats himself in the telegraph office, fills in a blank, scratches out what he has written, writes something else, scratches that out. But he would not have sat there so complacently had he anticipated the interview which was about to follow: the chief telegraphist stepped from the instrument room to the outer office and approached him with a ponderous tome under his arm—the Russian Bible.

"I saw you sitting here," he said, "and I had something I wanted to ask you."

The fact of the matter was the chief telegraphist, the local bookworm, had suddenly gained the impression that this Russian Bible of his was really no Bible at all, though he had had no convenient way of settling his doubts on the point. Why should a Russian Bible have such an odd appearance? It might very well be some other manner of book. On the other hand, why should a Russian Bible *not* look exactly like this? What if it did look very much like some kind of a catalogue? There, you see! The whole problem was decidedly perplexing and the chief telegraphist had just about come to the conclusion that the book was anyway, as it were, Satan's own Scripture, for he had been unable to sleep nights of late because of it.

"Can you read this book here?" he asked.

August smiled. "Blueberries for me!" he smiled.

"Well, what does this word mean?"

"That one there? That means in Norwegian something similar to Pontius Pilate."

"And this one?"

"That means 'with regard to.' Ay, 'with regard to.' That's what that means."

"I wish I knew if you're serious," said the chief telegraphist. Suddenly he asked pointedly: "See here, man, do you know Russian?"

August smiled again.

The telegraphist: "I'm not sure *what* you know, but I can tell you one thing—you're holding the book upside down. I can tell by the Greek characters."

August started. "Dear me," he said. "I can just as well turn the book the other way, if you like. But it's all one to me. I can read it either way."

The telegraphist: "How certain are you that this thing here is a Bible?"

August, exasperated: "Say, if you doubt that this is the Holy Bible, the Law and the Word of God Almighty, I can just as well take it back again for the five *kroner* you paid for it!"

This was the least he could do about it and right was only right. Of course such would mean a wicked expenditure on his part, the Bible was utterly useless to him, he couldn't exactly rent it out. No, but he must save his reputation.

The telegraphist points to a certain page: "What's this verse to do with?"

"That verse? Baptism, as I read it. The baptism of Jesus."

"What!" shrieks the telegraphist at the top of his voice. "There? So far forward in the book? In the Old Testament?"

August reached for his five *kroner*; he would do his best to get himself out of this tight place without injury to his reputation. "I don't see so well with these glasses. Never did see so well with them, but they were the only glasses I could get at the time. I bought them at a fair in Revel which is the capital of a country they call Esthonia. There were all kinds of other things I could have bought, but when I saw a man selling glasses I went right over to him and bought these. He was dressed in a homespun robe, like, with a rope around his middle and a glossy silk hat on his head, but other than that he was bare-footed. You never saw such a funny-looking merchant——"

The telegraphist's excitement mounted steadily as he waited for August to finish. At length he pointed to the page again and let out a brutal roar! "Is it true that this particular verse has to do with baptism? With the baptism of Jesus?"

"Well, now, I won't insist on it," August answered. "It might, of course, have to do with something else. I was

bright enough in my school days and I used to know all sorts of things, but what can you expect of a man of my age? Now I'll just take and polish up these glasses of mine—hhhhhhah—nice and bright and have a real good look. But you know when a man hasn't the proper glasses——”

“Wait a minute!” commanded the chief telegraphist and hurried off to his instrument which was frantically signalling.

No, August did not wait.

He was finished with his various jobs on the place and was free to return to the road construction. The last thing he had to do was to show Editor Davidsen the new motor car and explain the mechanism to him. This was to be the subject of an article in the *Segelfoss News*.

There were others, too, who came to him for expert advice. Two men from the motion picture theatre called to ask him if he would lay a cement floor for them. He could do this evenings and during other free periods, they suggested.

August merely shook his head; he was the Consul's man and would be unable to take on “private jobs,” in the district round about. “No no, my good friends,” he said. “I've altogether too much to take care of here!”

“That's a shame,” the men said. “We're in a tight place. Our old floor has rotted away.”

August, our busy friend, nevertheless found time to make a little jaunt down into South Parish. It was Saturday evening, the end of a bright summer day, and August had polished his shoes till they gleamed, had dressed himself up in a light linen suit purchased at the Segelfoss Store and had tied a red befringed kerchief about his waist for a sash. Thoroughly exotic he appeared and it was part of the program that he should. In his trousers pocket he jingled eight keys on a ring. Now what could those keys

betoken? Possibly they had something to do with eight treasure chests he was somewhere said to possess.

No sign of festivity in the home of Tobias now; the world and the goods of this world had been rooted from the family consciousness, for the Anabaptist had returned to resume his pious doings. Who could have believed such a thing of Tobias and his household! He had always been such a steadfast and diligent chap, and even if he hadn't burned down his own house last spring, he had been as pleased as punch when the insurance company paid out the money. But the preacher, that itinerant spiritual laundry, had had some effect upon him. Tobias had begun to feel some qualms; this business about the Holy Ghost was surely intricate and the end of it was that not only he himself, but his wife and Cornelia as well, were obliged to visit the river below the falls and go in for some holy scrubbing. Now who could have believed that of him!

Bustle and vociferation throughout the entire district; the Anabaptist reached about him with long arms and even succeeded in hauling in some of the present summer's crop of confirmands—school children whom he got to kneel down and shout out their sins during his testimonial meetings. And the duckings continued, even though there were already slight signs of autumn in the air and the temperature of Jordan's flood was only forty degrees.

But then something happened: another preacher came to town, another herald of the Lord, a competitor. The new man was holding forth up in North Parish and who should it be but Nilsen, an ordinary evangelist, with nothing to do with baptism, with little or no hocus-pocus involved in his gospel. Instead, he had brought with him a number of good sound written testimonials addressed to Pastor Ole Landsen by other legitimate ministers.

He proved to be a faithful servant of God, no great preacher, but kind of face and sincere in all he said. He

did not fail to create an impression and those who had taken the trouble to hear both preachers and were connoisseurs of prayer meetings held Nilsen to be a hair's breadth more liberal than the other. He was a simple man, wore not even a necktie, but in its place a plain yellow neckerchief, no black coat hanging clear to his knees, and his hands could not be called white. But Nilsen was not to be disesteemed for that.

It was, of course, quite unavoidable that he should talk against the Anabaptist and his activities in the south end of the parish. Not even one of God's angels in Heaven could have avoided that. And it was here that Nilsen proved himself to be unexpectedly clever; that devil of a Nilsen, if he didn't have something of a tongue in his head: "They are at their baptising again down there in South Parish," said he. "And there they are jeering at and making mock of the Holy Ghost. But, my friends, it shows decidedly bad breeding to sneer and mock—when the one you refer to is *absent!*" he concluded pointedly.

By means of such simple, cosy peasant talk Nilsen was able to hold his listeners, but in the long run he could not last out against the preacher in South Parish who employed such hocus-pocus as kneeling down and popping up and treating folk to cold baths in running water. And the result was a general split, hatred and unrest there in Ole Landsen's spiritual domain, and when at length it began to happen that folk went for each other on public thoroughfares, the *Segelfoss News* again asked Pastor Landsen if he didn't feel that now he had grounds to interfere. "No," replied the local minister. "It doesn't amount to anything. Just give it time. By winter it will all be over with!"

The battle for the Holy Ghost raged on without signs of abating. Never before in history had this obscure God in God come in for such glowing publicity—the Anabap-

tist preached an entire sermon on the subject of this element of the Trinity and made Him far better known in the Segelfoss district than He was elsewhere in the whole of Norway. It was unbelievable how minutely the preacher could define Him—it was almost as though the Holy Ghost had sat to him for a portrait. “And what’s more, I can tell you his name in Latin!” he bellowed. “His name is Spiritus Sanctus. Go ahead, ask anybody you like if that’s not right!”

August, with but slight theological training, suddenly found himself in the very midst of this spiritual frenzy. Tobias no longer mentioned the horse he had received as a gift, made no mention of the frivolous red sash August was wearing about his waist, thought only of the sermon to be preached on the morrow—followed by further wallowings in the waters of Jordan.

Oh, kiss your grandmother! August probably thought to himself and didn’t even stop to cross himself. “Let me have a word with you, Cornelia!” he said.

Cornelia rose unwillingly and followed him out of doors. In a field at the side grazed the mare; as usual, she raised her head to glare in their direction. And as usual, a youth was to be seen rambling down the road from the neighbouring farm.

“Well, how are you getting along with the mare these days?” asked August, determined that the creature should receive at least some mention.

“Oh, the mare——” said Cornelia. “Ay well, she’s a devil to get into the harness, but otherwise she’s all right.”

“Well now, that’s fine!”

“But father, he’s begun to complain about it,” said Cornelia. “He wonders if he isn’t committing a sin to keep her.”

“A sin? Against me?” cried August, the millionaire. “You mean he thinks I couldn’t afford it?”

“No—no, that isn’t what he meant——”

“Well, let’s hope not, at least! A mere horse? Hahaha!”

And August took out his bunch of keys and glanced at them, full of ownership.

"No, he was wondering if he wasn't sinning against the man who sold the horse."

August, a bit long in the face: "The man got what he asked, didn't he? I didn't beat him down on the price, that I know of!"

"No," said Cornelia. "But, you see, there he was, a poor man, who was forced to sell. And now he must pack home firewood and hay on his back. A poor fellow who hasn't even a horse in this world."

August thought for a time, then said in utter desperation: "Well, I can easily take back the horse!"

The youth from the neighbouring farm draws near—Hendrik, Cornelia's other sweetheart. He steps up to them and without a word of greeting asks: "What are you talking about, you two?"

"He wants to take back the horse," says Cornelia.

"What's that—the horse he gave you as a gift?"

August gives him fair warning: "Keep that nasty little snout of yours shut when I'm talking!"

No effect. No, Hendrik's soul has become likewise awakened; he is pious now, God loves him and will watch over him. What can the world do to him now!

Cornelia began to weep.

"Don't cry, Cornelia!" said Hendrik. "He isn't thinking of taking the horse away. That's impossible."

"Listen here, you!" August warns him for the second time. "Get out of here!" And, at the same time, August makes a little flick of his hand in the direction of his hip pocket.

No effect here, either. Hendrik paled, as was to be expected, but he refused to budge. And Cornelia wept and clutched his arm and said: "No, you're to stay right here!"

This staggered August somewhat. "Oh, so that's how it stands, is it!" he said.

"Ay, we are one now," explained Cornelia. "Hendrik is just like us others and tomorrow he will also be baptised. Then we'll be together in that, too."

August suddenly realized that he was losing the game and again fell to thinking to himself. When he spoke again, he said: "Look, Cornelia, I only came out here to tell you that I have had that Benjamin working for me for a time—that sweetheart of yours, you know, the one who holds you on his lap at Christmas dances——"

"Let him go on talking!" said Hendrik.

"He's made good money working for me," continued August. "And he's a fine lad and a bright lad, too. You'd never go wrong on him, Cornelia."

"I like your nerve!" said Cornelia. "He's nothing to me any more. He goes to hear Nilsen—he's not one of *our* kind!"

"There's something so nice about that Benjamin," said August. "And honest, too. I've given him my keys and put him in charge of everything I own and I've never missed so much as a pin from that day to this."

"It's nothing to me what you say!"

"And you'd never imagine all the things he's learned from me! I'll give him a fine letter of recommendation any day he likes and that you can believe! I'll let you read the letter yourself."

Cornelia was becoming more and more annoyed; at length she went far enough to say: "I don't know who you're talking about."

"Benjamin, that sweetheart of yours. Oh, you know who I mean, all right—he's kissed you more than once and kissed you good and proper, too——"

Hendrik undertook to exclaim: "I don't see why we should go on listening to this man! He is not one of our kind. He's full of the impurity of this world."

"You filthy little snot!" cried August. "I'd do well to pick you up and wipe up the ground with you! What kind of clown is this you're grabbing by the arm, Cornelia! He

hasn't got so much as a knife and spoon to his name and he couldn't even buy himself a pair of shoes to keep from going barefoot this winter! But that sweetheart of yours—that Benjamin—it's me that's looking out for him, and I'll teach him all kinds of trades and ways to make good money, too. Don't you worry about that!"

And Cornelia burst into tears; ay, that she did. But she refused to give in, so thoroughly baptised and religious had she become. "Gold and worldly goods we may never have much of," she said. "But our daily bread will be enough for us."

"Ay," said Hendrik, and agreed with her thoroughly.

"All right. It's all the same to me," said August. "And I'm all through trying to talk to you. But you needn't think you can make a fool of that Benjamin. No. For there isn't a girl in the whole of North Parish he can't have if he likes. But best of all, he can even have one of the housemaids at the Manor if he likes. She's crazy about him. Anyone could see as much with one eye shut."

Cornelia flared up at this. "Ho, so maybe he'll take her?"

"I wouldn't say a word as to that!" August answered. . . .

He tramped back to town, fretful and annoyed. His jaunt had proved unfortunate—he had completely neglected his personal interests where Cornelia was concerned and had struggled on another's behalf. But even in this miserable direction he had failed to accomplish his ends.

He called at the motion picture theatre and sent to North Parish after Benjamin to come and lay a cement floor. The present job would involve no small amount of work, as the ground beneath would first have to be dried out and a draining system installed. Benjamin would have enough to keep him busy until haying time at home.

What would Cornelia have to say about that? Oh, those stupid womenfolk!

But Cornelia, after all, was certainly no worse in af-

fairs of the heart than others of her sex—all women were alike. He spat. Maybe he didn't know them! What prevented them from indulging in the vilest of folly? What had he not experienced of an evening upon returning home? Who could control them when they took it into their heads to fly loose?

He felt disconsolate indeed as he went strolling home to the Manor. He was completely out of sorts and at length stopped in at the gardener Steffen's room to see if he couldn't get up a card game for that same evening. But Steffen was engaged, Steffen had his sweetheart in from the country to visit him in his room and there he now sat entertaining her with a bag of cookies, as hard as rocks, he had bought for her at the store.

"Come in Altmulig," said Steffen. "This is only my girl and me."

"Ay, but we're not making love!" said his sweetheart, tauntingly.

Steffen, with self-justification: "I just got these cookies here from the store, so you wouldn't have to go home hungry."

"They're not to be got down," she said.

Steffen sat there making a heroic job of munching and chewing, but the lady seemed unwilling to risk her teeth. At length she resolutely took them out of her mouth and set them down on the table. False teeth in a plate of red India rubber and slimy into the bargain. Steffen gave them an ugly scowl. The lady now began gummily to suck on a petrified cookie.

"You're a pig!" said Steffen.

"And you, with those horse teeth of yours?"

"Take that thing away!" he bellowed in desperation.

"So so," she replied, and sucked her plate back into her mouth.

"I've puked at less than that," said Steffen.

"You brute!" replied his sweetheart.

"Ay, but it looked like some part of your insides!"

"I won't so much as answer such filthy talk!"

Their words grew more and more harsh and bitter. At length tears and poundings on the table.

"I'll go right off and leave you," the lady howled. "You're nothing to me!"

"Go ahead and leave! See if I care!" Steffen shot back.

"Happy journey to you!"

They played through the entire scene. . . .

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE road workers were relieved when their regular foreman, August, returned to the job. He had been absent so much of late, had appeared only occasionally to deal with some specific problem, and otherwise had left Adolf, as it were, in charge of operations. But the men were loath to obey Adolf's commands; after all, he was no better than they themselves and they made a fool of him and consulted him on various silly points where no advice was needed. The Trønder Francis was particularly objectionable in this respect; he might load up his wheelbarrow and suddenly go over to Adolf and ask if he were supposed to trundle it away.

Their opposition to Adolf had its basic origin in their feelings of jealousy. Marna, the Consul's sister, was not an infrequent visitor along the line of construction. She made the most of her life of indolent ease and seldom neglected to seek out Adolf with whom she would stop for a chat. Adolf was robust and handsome, he removed his cap when he greeted her, his speech was courteous, and now and then he would blush. Nothing escaped the eyes of his fellows, and they were after him the very moment the lady had disappeared.

They were now at work in several places blasting away a bit more of the cliff at the right for the purpose of widening the road; otherwise the shoulders were complete along the entire line—a bit more work on the surface and the road would be ready for traffic. Nevertheless, to slice off but a foot or two of solid cliff for a distance of no more than three or four yards would take time and necessitate no end of blasting.

But August was no longer the old boss he had been before, and his workmen took note of the change. He was no longer racing up and down the line, he lacked his former certainty of decision, he no longer harped continually on the subject of order and discipline. He confessed that his sight and hearing were beginning to fail, though his health in other respects was as good as ever, he said. But the workmen agreed amongst themselves that it must really be his mind which had begun to fail. No, he was not the man he had been before.

Naturally he had never written that letter to Paulina in Polden and, as a consequence, his money had failed to arrive. Such a condition, it is obvious, is likely to turn a man's mind.

Along about this time he happened one evening upon Aase and it was his thought at once to hear what she might have to say in regard to that money of his: would he get it, or could he kiss it goodbye? He halted her and asked her advice in a matter of great importance to him. She stared him hard in the eyes, then without uttering a word, she drew him to one side, spread her legs wide apart and lifted up her clothes, so that she stood there nude to the navel. Meanwhile she continued to stare into his eyes.

"Hey——! Well I never!" August managed to stammer.

"I just wanted to see!" she said and let her clothes drop back into place.

Now it may be that August's face had momentarily beamed at what his eyes had witnessed and it is likewise possible that he had gone further and moistened his lips.

"You old swine!" said Aase. "That's why you go there all the time. You want her!"

Hell and damnation! This was not what he had hoped to hear from Aase, though he knew she had spoken the truth—unfortunately, the words were all too true—night and day the girl had haunted his dreams.

August laid his head on one side and said: "Tell me something about that!"

Aase tossed her head contemptuously.

"Ho, isn't there anything you can tell me about that?" he asked.

Aase scowled darkly at him, strode past him and was on her way.

So he was just as near . . .

Fate appeared dead set against him and that money of his. It even tried to tempt him into complaining against the Lord. As though he could ever do that! He was both sorry for himself and resentful, but even so, he was no godless man. No, he looked up to God. He had learned from the various tight squeezes in which he had found himself during the course of his roving career that God was a splendid force to feel at one's back—during a shipwreck, for example, during periods of the utmost poverty, for example, or at moments when he was in possible danger of receiving a revolver shot or a knife thrust. From each crisis, he had emerged safe and sound. Ay, God was a friend worth having! . . . Well, what if he were to turn downright religious now and rely entirely upon a life of simple piety? It would do him no harm, at least—and, possibly it might help him the better to get along without his money.

The road crews now learned to their astonishment that they were no longer to swear at a stone which had injured a toe or a finger.

August was putting in a good bit of time at the blacksmith shop these days. He was helping to produce the divers parts of ironwork for the fencing he would install at the two danger points along the new road. A splendid variation in his tasks and a welcome one. At the same time he could keep an eye on Benjamin's work in the theatre.

"I wonder if you've prayed the Lord to help you on with this job," he said to Benjamin.

Benjamin had heard strange words from August's lips before, so he essayed no elaborate reply. He pointed to the work he had already performed and indicated what he would have to do to complete the job—oh yes, he knew what he was doing all right!

"You should thank God for that!" said August.

Adolf comes to him and complains of his comrades' disobedience and open defiance, and begs August to come back on the job. The men were wasting their time wrangling among themselves; sometimes they would get drunk during rest periods; they were lagging behind in their work. August promised to come up and look into the matter.

He understood very well what the matter was; he knew his men. For months chained to this construction work and deprived of all traffic with women, they were now heartily sick of each other's company and would fly into a rage on the slightest provocation. Furthermore, they were half-mad with jealousy and Adolf was hardly safe from attack.

This feeling flared up anew on the day when Frøken Marna appeared in the company of Druggist Holm. The men envied even the druggist his walk with this beautiful girl—to be sure, for how could they help it!—but the truth of the matter was, they could in a way endure this fellow, whereas they could not in the least endure Adolf. And this must have come mainly of the fact that Marna was so thoroughly scornful of the attentions of her present swain. She appeared to detest his very presence. It was indeed a pitiful sight when the druggist's sweetest and most charming speeches would evoke from the lady's lips nought save a scornful grimace. The men on the road undertook to snicker at this—Hi, lads, she's no use for him even if he does have a flower in his buttonhole and tries to look like a swell!—His boutonnière, a carnation, had been fresh some days before and it had clung bravely

to its fragrant blush, having reposed each night in a tumbler of water, but at last this day the hand of death was upon it.

Holm: "Here I stand talking away to myself and not knowing what I may do to interest you."

"Keep still! That will interest me!" grated Frøken Marna.

"Are you really as cruel as that? Ah, so I am merely spoiling my every chance with you."

"You have absolutely no chance whatever with me!"

"No, so I observe. Well, here I go with a house plant stuck in my lapel and a part in my hair, yet all seems to escape your attention."

Marna appeared unwilling to hear another word out of him and the workers snickered further and poked each other in the ribs. No, lads, he'll never get anywhere with her, that's one thing sure! Why, she's too good for an old rooster like him!

"Where are you keeping Adolf today?" the lady inquires of the men.

No one answers.

Marna walks slowly up the new road, apparently of the opinion that she will find him somewhere above. The druggist accompanies her.

The Trønder Francis is the first to express himself. "Now I don't know as you could exactly call the druggist an old rooster," he says. "He's better than that Adolf, he is."

The druggist? they all shout. A remarkable fellow! Isn't he decent enough to hand out a bottle now and then in that drugstore of his? Why, Boldemand, he had even got two bottles the time he had cried and said he was bound for a funeral. Isn't that right, Boldemand?

"I could have got four!" boasted Boldemand. "That's the kind of man *he* is!"

"Where are you keeping our Adolf today?" one of the men mocks scornfully. "Hehehe, come on out with Adolf now! I really must know where Adolf is! Hahaha!"

No, the druggist is a horse of a different colour, they all agree. A husky fellow, too. Broad shoulders on him. You ought to see him row a boat! Ay, you must have observed that there is a man who *is* something. But Adolf——

The next time Marna arrived, she was seated on a horse, the druggist accompanying her on foot. You see, after her brother, Gordon Tidemand, had got him that car of his, he had turned his carriage horse over to Marna who had forthwith taken up riding. She sat heavily in the saddle, though she rode with a certain air. The horse was well-rested and lively; now and then it would toss its head and sidestep. The druggist continued to shower his sweet nothings upon the lady of his dreams and his verbal courtship showed little short of virtuosity. Yet Marna seldom troubled so much as to acknowledge his compliments; no, she made straight for Adolf to show the latter how beautiful she appeared on horseback and to demonstrate her marvelous equestrian talent by jumping over a wheelbarrow which stood there in the road.

"It is charming to observe with what finesse you manage that Arab of yours," said the druggist.

"Have you noticed what beautiful eyes Adolf has?" she replied dotingly.

"But I, too, have beautiful eyes," said Druggist Holm. "That is, when I turn them upon you."

"Have you?" she replied. "I don't believe I've ever seen your eyes. You're always hiding them."

The druggist bowed his head. "That comes of my humility," he said. "I bow my head. I dare only glance at the hem of your garment."

On the way home, as it was down-grade, she galloped

off and left him. . . . From that day on, she and the druggist never again visited the road in each other's company.

But Druggist Holm was by no means left without resources; in a few days he was seen strolling up the new road with Marna's mother—with none other than Gammelmoderen. He was dashingly attired in a handsome suit of clothes, a brand-new hat worn at a rakish angle, the corner of a white silk handkerchief peeping from his breast pocket. Exactly why he had chosen Gammelmoderen to accompany him on this walk—whether it had been his thought to come at Marna via her mother, or whether it had been a sheer desire on his part to go sight-seeing—no one was able to determine. But, at least, the druggist was not without resourcefulness. And the pair seemed to enjoy each other's company thoroughly; Holm was indeed entertaining and his lady laughed with the spontaneity of youth at the fancifulness of his remarks. Their conversation was lively and scintillant.

But now the situation up on the road became truly critical. Marna was visiting the construction more frequently than ever and, as the druggist no longer accompanied her, Adolf was now left without a rival. This led to open insurrection in the ranks of the workmen and Adolf was obliged to go to August in the smithy and resign his job as foreman. August objected and reminded Adolf that he would thus lose the added pay he had coming to him, but all right, let it go at that, Adolf said.

August considered the situation: he might perhaps put Boldemand in charge of the crew for the days still needed to put up the iron fencing, but Boldemand, it seemed, was a fiend for the bottle. And how would it aid matters, even were Adolf to be removed as foreman? Marna could find him aloft with the gang, and then, as he would again be simply a common labourer, his comrades would at last be free to murder him. Such was by no means unthinkable.

The point was, Marna would have to be restrained from visiting the new road. She was the root of the entire difficulty. The men had become like gunpowder, and their thoughts were hardly upon God.

August called at the Consul's office, dropped his cap to the floor and bowed.

The Consul descended from his high stool and said in a friendly voice: "Glad to see you, Altmulig. I was going to ask you when you imagine the new road will be completed."

"You ask me and I ask you."

"Hm."

"Ay, for we've trouble in one way or another. If only the men can be left to work in peace——"

"How's that—are they being disturbed?"

August reviewed conditions as they existed at present on the road: the men were out of control—they couldn't stand the sight of young and beautiful womenfolk come there to watch them work—their thoughts were not upon God.

The Consul looked uncertainly at his old *altmuligmand*. What, was it God he had mentioned?

August continued: bright summer days and mountain air and the food they ate did not satisfy them—pardon now, but they had become a good bit wrought up and felt a hunger for anyone they might happen to see—ay, even for that Aase, he had been told.

"What rot!" said the Consul.

"Ay. And now I've come to warn you against letting any of your own ladies—to tell you she shouldn't visit the road any more."

"Marna? She can give that up, I suppose."

"For it might be dangerous for her. And besides, the lads don't do a stroke of work so long as she is there; they just stand around and look at her. She makes them feel restless. Pardon, but they're all in love with her,

they're very fond of her, and when she goes talking with that Adolf——"

"Very well, very well!" said the Consul, annoyed. "Marna will go there no more. Today marks the end of that. And now, Altmulig, when do you think you can finish the road?"

August brightened at this. "If we can be left in peace, we can be finished up there in three weeks' time. That is, if we are left in peace. But, after all, everything rests in the hand of God," he added thoughtfully.

"Of course, there is no especial hurry about it," said the Consul. "But I am expecting a friend from England to visit me during the hunting season. I'll need the road by that time. But, as you say, you'll be finished long before then. By the way, have you seen anything in the way of game up the mountain this summer?"

"I should think I have! Nothing very big, though, as I should say. But one covey of ptarmigan after another. And no end of rabbits."

"Are you a hunter yourself, Altmulig?"

"In my younger days. I should say as I was a hunter then! One winter I shot and trapped a whole eight-oar load of the finest of furs and sailed them down the coast to the fair at Stokmarknes."

"Furs? What kind?"

"Otter and fox, a few ermine, a bit of sealskin. Ay, those were the days! And later on, up in the Andes and out in Java and different other places——"

The Consul interrupted him: "The Englishman I am expecting to visit me this autumn is a gentleman of decidedly high quality—he is a nobleman, the owner of vast estates. We were together in school. I've been entertained in his home and now I should like to do a little something for him in return. If you can think of anything out of the ordinary, Altmulig, I wish you'd mention it to me."

"Everything rests in the hand of God," said August.

The Consul started at this, but nodded his head and said: "Yes."

"If we live that long," said August. "That's what I meant."

"Yes," the Consul repeated. But old Altmulig was not himself this day; something must have happened to him of late. The Consul inquired after his health. It was excellent. Had anything gone wrong with him, then? Of course not! On the contrary, he had a large sum of money on deposit somewhere, but dashed if he was able to get hold of it, and now God was helping him to get along without it, so in truth there was nought save joy and music in his breast. . . .

When the Consul returned home that night, his first words to his wife were: "Of all things, Altmulig has gone religious! I am really at a loss to comprehend it."

"Altmulig? So. Yes, I've seen him cross himself a few times," said Fru Juliet.

"Yes, but it's even worse than that now. And I must request you to refrain from profanity and frivolous conversation the next time you happen to meet him."

"Hahaha!" laughed Fru Juliet.

From this he turned to the present situation up on the new road. As the whole matter appealed to them in terms of the wildest comedy, they laughed and joked and had no end of fun over it. Gordon Tidemand who was either too weak and evasive or else too delicate and refined, put the matter of speaking to Marna off onto his wife. "You must have a talk with Marna," he said. "You could manage it so much more discreetly than I. Tell her that all the road men are crazy about her, hahaha, that they cannot live without her, but that there is one Adolf in particular who craves her hand and who really has the most honourable intentions! But that on account of this, he is in danger of being beaten to death by the others! Hahaha!"

Fru Juliet managed to laugh with him, but it appeared that she was likewise able to view the situation from Marna's point of view. "It is possible that she herself is in love with this Adolf," she said.

"Then she is out of her head!" said Gordon Tidemand. "And we'll simply ship her back to Helgeland where she came from. She is not to set foot upon that new road again, tell her that! Who ever heard of such a thing! And you must be straight up and down with her, Juliet, just as though you felt you were I!"

"Yes," said Fru Juliet.

Gordon Tidemand always shrank from all forms of personal friction and he was decidedly relieved at the thought of avoiding a possible scene with his sister. His tone was at once jocular again: "And here's another thing, Juliet—I don't ever want to hear of you showing yourself up there on the road, either, do you understand? If I ever find you up there, I'll shoot you!"

"Haha!"

"For I know of no one worse than you are when it comes to getting us wretched menfolks excited to the point of losing what little common sense we have."

"Haha. That's enough, Gordon! Will you return me the favour and speak to those maids of ours?" she asked. "They've gone a bit daft themselves. They are attending revival meetings held by a certain Anabaptist down in South Parish and, along with this, they've taken so to bathing and scrubbing themselves that they are in the bath twice a day now, and the rest of us hardly get so much as a chance at it!"

"Such impudence!" says Gordon Tidemand.

"I have asked them the meaning of all this sudden cleanliness, and the answer they give me is that they do not wish to appear filthy on the day when they must take off their chemises for baptism in the river below the falls."

"Why, I've never heard of such a thing! Which of the girls are they?"

"The parlour maids. I hope you will deal with them properly."

"I? Juliet, don't you think it would be best——"

"And you must be straight up and down with them, Gordon, just exactly as though you were I!" says Fru Juliet.

"No, I——?" replies the Consul, Gordon Tidemand. "I really feel that lies in your province, my dear. Seriously speaking, the maids—no, they are in your department, quite! You would not wish them to do as they please in *your* house, would you? If I were mistress here, they would change their song and dance right quickly, or else—— Why, who ever heard of such a thing! But here's another point—now that general wickedness seems to be the order of the day, what if you and I were to go for another automobile ride this afternoon? What do you say to that, eh?"

"That might not be such a bad idea," said Fru Juliet.

"The weather is so fine, we can take the children with us. The baby, too."

Peace along the new road. Marna comes no more.

The fact that the druggist and Gammelmoderen still visited their project was nothing to the workmen—nothing to bother about there! Adolf toiled faithfully and steadily with his own crew, Boldemand who had no eye for the opposite sex was in charge and the work was progressing with a dash. August had good reason to be satisfied.

But many were those whom August was to assist by word and deed. It was the consensus of opinion that he was splendid to confide in and that he could always think of many ways out of a difficulty. Now, for example, there

was Gammelmoderen. "If you please, may I have a few words with you, Altmulig?" she had asked modestly.

"Who's to prevent it!" August had replied.

Gammelmoderen was at a crisis; ay, she was, as it were, in a bad way and during the past two weeks her head had been plagued by many thoughts. You see, it would never do for Alexander and her to lock themselves up in the smokehouse together. That was one solution to the problem, but in the long run it wouldn't do. The couple could not very well avoid at one time or another unlocking the door to allow one of them to slip outside, but it was a simple matter for some interloper to rush up and detect the presence of the one remaining inside. It was the parlour-maids who had made the discovery, Blonda and Stina, two sisters whom Gammelmoderen had had in her service since the days of her youth and who were of an age with herself. The sisters had not wished their old mistress to come to any harm; they had gone religious and it was their desire to save her.

But that had been the end of their locking themselves up in the smokehouse.

And not enough with that, Gammelmoderen had been certain that from then on an eye would be kept on her window, in order that no tall man should come slipping into her room.

So the final way out had also been closed to her. . . .

And then one day whilst walking along the street in town Gammelmoderen had encountered Druggist Holm who had greeted her in his characteristically jovial manner. And he had at once assumed a jaunty air and invited her to stop in at the hotel with him. "A glass of wine?" he had asked. An amusing interlude, a quiet little revel in broad daylight, right there where people could see, an innocent affair and amusing. No, a large and charming hotel dining room was nothing to be mentioned in the same breath with the storage bin off the smokehouse back

home. One did not whisper here, one spoke in a natural tone of voice. . . . Later they had strolled up the new road together—if you please, let everyone see!

That was the first time.

"We must repeat this some time," Holm had said. "It was a most pleasant walk for me. I was able to avoid going home where only my patience cards awaited me."

Gammelmoderen had been no less pleased with her afternoon; she had again got a taste of open air and of daylight, it had been loads of fun and she had laughed heartily for the first time in many moons. And she had talked intelligently, too. Oh, Gammelmoderen, she was good for anything!

And they had repeated their walk together, had taken the same immense pleasure in each other's company and a new type of joy had begun to dawn in Gammelmoderen's heart. It had been so long, and it seemed so good! She could have blessed her two parlour maids who had stood in the way of a less wholesome solution to her life's problem. She had misjudged Blonda and Stina, for they had been but tools in the creation of a greater happiness for her. In the sweetest manner possible, she would relieve them from further guarding of her window.

One Sunday Blonda had announced her intention of attending an Anabaptist prayer meeting in South Parish. "Ay ay, here I am going off and leaving you," she said. "But if anything should happen, just ring the bell real loud. Ring it real hard——"

"Nothing will happen," said Gammelmoderen.

"——for I was thinking—in case Stina should go to bed——"

"Stina is not going to bed."

Blonda started. "Have you asked her to remain up, then?"

"No, but you may speak to her before you leave."

They looked at each other.

"But," said Gammelmoderen, "you two are simply not to stay up nights watching my window any more. No one is going to try to get in!"

Blonda had gone all to pieces: "Well—no no—all right—ay——" she had stammered.

"Good-night, Blonda!" . . .

And now it is that Gammelmoderen comes to August humbly to beg a few words with him. She is at a crisis, her mind is plagued with a thousand thoughts, it is so difficult to settle her problem, to extricate herself—Altmulig must now advise her.

"Pray to God!" says August.

Gammelmoderen arches her brows and stares at him in amazement. "No, really—I'm not joking," she says.

"Neither am I," he replies.

"Well, but you see, Altmulig—it is so with me now that I can't have things going on in this manner. He simply must leave me in peace. I can not smoke salmon with him any longer. But then I don't know what Gordon is going to do. I suppose he might send him away. That would be the best thing. But who can he get in his place, then?"

August's brain immediately flashes a thought of Benjamin, but he refuses to yield to such mundane temptation—he will not be so quick to seek triumph at another's expense—Benjamin could look to the lilies of the field——

Gammelmoderen continued, pained with the thought of the innumerable difficulties she herself had brought about: the time was not far distant when it would be closed season for salmon fishing—the exact date she had forgotten and she would have to ask him—what's that? She certainly would not ask *him*—she would ask her own son about that! Why, the very idea! But, in any event, the date would soon be at hand, and what if Gordon should decide to discontinue immediately? What did Altmulig think about that? But, said that capable woman who was the widow of none other than Theodore paa Bua, it would be a grand

pity to discontinue at once, for the fishing was still excellent here, and, with the approach of the closed season, salmon prices were mounting. So she couldn't understand at all what to do. And neither could she talk with Gordon about this matter—no, how could she do that? How could she tell him that she was through smoking salmon and all that? Surely Altmulig could see at a glance how utterly impossible that would be. But now he must find a way out of her dilemma. . . .

And yes, August already had his advice on the tip of his tongue; Gammelmoderen's difficulties were nothing to speak of, he could solve them all with a half-dozen words at the most, if he might be so mundane. "Don't you worry about that!" he said.

"What do you mean?"

"Let him smoke salmon alone!"

Gammelmoderen: "I've thought of that, too, but—Oh yes, I've given that no end of thought. But then the point will come up—then the whole thing will come up—that I've never at any time been indispensable there in the smokehouse."

August became more and more mundane; inside that keen old head of his he was positively blazing with light. "Why, you were indispensable only so long as he didn't know how to do things himself, weren't you? Just let me ask you that! But now you've taught him the trick and that makes quite a difference, doesn't it?"

"Yes," she said. "That's true."

Both continued to think. Gammelmoderen shook her head. "If only he will stand for it!" she said.

"Who? Let him try to start something! Besides, it's no kind of a profession for one like you to be standing there in that hole smoking salmon. The Consul's own mother——"

"If only I can make the change without getting into trouble!"

"Haha, that makes me laugh! Pardon me——! The first

time you are sick. Ay, the first couple of times you are sick. After that, the thing will go of itself!"

Gammelmoderen exclaims: "That's it, Altmulig, God bless you! I never thought of that. That way nothing will come up. I knew I should get help from you. It was just as though someone had whispered it into my ear. And you're so kind—dear Altmulig——"

The first time there was salmon to be smoked, Gammelmoderen was ill, confined to her room. Alexander sent a message in to her saying that now she must come. It was August who brought him his answer out in the smoke-house. "What's the matter with you, you jackass? Don't you know that Gammelmoderen is sick abed?" he said to open the conversation. "Even so, I'll be switched if I can see why a fellow like you is in need of a skirt to help him smoke his salmon. How many months have you been at it now? You must be an eternally stupid clown never to learn how to do things for yourself! You don't know the difference between a smoked salmon and a calf! If I was the pastor of your parish, you bet I'd never confirm you, and if I was the Consul I'd kick you out as useless before another day went by! Yes sir! Now what are you jabbering after female help for? Is it maybe a rag you want tied on your finger? Come on now, let me hear what it is about this business of smoking salmon you're too stupid to know for yourself, and I'll tell you all about it, just to save a poor——"

Alexander surely must have considered himself anything but deserving of this stream of abuse, for his face went pale and his breath came in short gasps. Nevertheless, all must agree that his reply was really mild and sweet under the circumstances: "Hold that jaw of yours, you sour-bellied old puke, you!" he said. "I'd be doing right to wring the dung out of you and make you eat it again, do you get that!" This was as far as Alexander permitted himself to proceed in this vein; he bit his lip

and immediately fell to defending his knowledge: "Maybe you think I don't know how to smoke salmon?" he said. "Have I done much of anything else either the first time I was here in Segelfoss or this time? Don't try to tell me anything else, you musty old spook, you! I know all about the colour, the smell, the taste and anything else you can mention—now get that into your head!"

"That's what I thought," said August. "It would be a disgrace to you if you didn't!"

Alexander went further to boast: "And as far as I stand, I don't need anybody to help me smoke salmon. Ho, that's a fine thing to hear! Now go on and get out of here so I can find room to spit! Did I ask you to come around here to teach me so much as can be stuck on a hair? Now dry up and get out of that door there!"

"You're a fool to go and get mad like that, you filthy ragamuffin, you!" said August. "You ought to thank God for having at last succeeded in prying a little something into that head of yours. But I don't suppose you ever trouble yourself very much about God——"

. . . The second time there was salmon to be smoked Gammelmoderen made the fatal mistake of not being ill. On the contrary, she appeared in the best of health and she was likewise stupid enough to go down into town and, in broad daylight, to meet Holm, that new swain of hers for the purpose of going for another jaunt up the new road. Such incredible insouciance right in the middle of the afternoon! And was her aim simply to bait the entire town? It seemed so; the courtship of this pair seemed marked with urgency. The road crew took note of the fact that they now both deported themselves in a somewhat quieter manner than before—no more laughter and idle chatter—in a word, a bond of sincere tenderness now seemed to exist between them. What did Holm mean by helping the lady past stones and wheelbarrows over which she could have leapt as lightly as Marna's Arab? Had he gone a bit foolish in the head?

They strolled up the road all the way to the "hunting lodge," where they sat gazing across the waters of a mountain lake. There was no moonlight—no, but there was rich sunshine. They were both fresh and charmingly flushed after their climb and they smiled frequently, no sign of foolishness from either side. Holm was careful of the crease in his trousers and must have been striving to create something of an impression, what with that fresh carnation in his button-hole and all; and Gammelmoderen, for her part, removed her hat from the lush extravagance of her hair and sat there like the very girl she once had been.

They were a pair, in many respects alike—both straightforward by nature, both with a sense of humour, both with a healthy lust after life. Nor was there any great disparity of age to keep them apart; Gammelmoderen was possibly a bit older than Holm but she was sound of body and decidedly attractive, not a wrinkle in her face, and her hands were remarkably beautiful.

They spoke of the lake and the summits rising about its shores, they asked each other's impressions and yes, both found the scene lovely indeed. What a splendid idea of Gordon Tidemand's to arrange for this pleasant spot where they might sit and commune with nature!

"Hunting lodge," Holm mused. "Yes, there is a house there, isn't there? Well, I suppose we might live up here——"

"Yes," she replied and laughed to show she hadn't taken him seriously.

"House and outhouse, a highway leading to our very door—all the conveniences."

"Yes. Hahaha!"

He offered her his carnation, but she declined, explaining that it would look more fetching where it was. He lighted up his pipe and was careful to blow the smoke as far as possible away from her.

Suddenly she rose and went to peer around the corner

of the house; when she returned and sat down, her face was paler than before. "I thought I heard someone rustling back there and went to see if it were Gordon."

"Fine, then I suppose he could unlock this hunting-lodge of his and invite us in, eh?"

"He surely would, if it were he. Gordon loves so to be host. But I'm not sure whether anything has been put in the cellar here yet."

"I've never yet forgotten," said Holm, "that charming dinner you all gave us last spring."

"When you were so impolite at the table and pinched me so that I screamed!"

"Unfortunately, yes," said Holm. "I had, you see, stopped in to pay a visit to my old friend Vendt of the hotel."

"Oh, that was nothing," Gammelmoderen said to reassure him. "I was giddy myself from all that wine and I was glad to know that life hadn't left me behind. My, but it was fun!"

"But what did your son say?"

"Gordon? He never says anything about such matters. He's a good boy."

"And Fru Juliet is so sweet."

"Yes, isn't she! Where is her equal to be found? We are all so fond of her!"

"Ah yes, take it all in all, everything seems good!" said Holm, picking a straw from her dress.

"Magnificent! Good Lord, how beautiful the world seems! I shall never leave it if I can do anything to prevent it!"

August appeared walking slowly and thoughtfully up the road. Observing the pair, he greeted them and sat down for a moment beside them. In his hand he had a measuring tape which he kept pulling out and springing back on the spool.

"We came out to inspect your road, Altmulig," said Gammelmoderen. "I simply couldn't stay indoors today."

"Ay, the weather's too fine to stay in the house," he said apologetically.

"And such a fine road as you have built!"

"With God's help!" August said.

The druggist laughed aloud at this remark; he had taken it for a joke—poor fellow, he knew no better. Pointing to the measuring tape, he said flippantly: "That's no kind of thing to hang yourself with, Altmulig, if that's what you have in mind."

August: "Don't use such sinful talk!"

The druggist, attempting to make up for his remark: "Well, did you get that million of yours from the judge yet?"

"Million?" said August. "It wasn't a million exactly, but it was quite a sum of money, all the same. I haven't got it yet and I suppose I never will. But I know that the Lord will help me now as He has always done in the past."

"No doubt He will. What's He for, if not to help His children?"

"Well, I have my work to do. I didn't come here to sit down," said August, rising.

"What are you up to now, Altmulig?" asked Gammelmoderen, if only to say something.

"Just a bit of measuring. The Consul wants a fence put up here at the edge of the steep."

"Ugh, how frightfully far down it goes! I don't even dare look down. Well, good-bye, Altmulig. See you later."

The couple departed, leaving August to his work of measuring. A sound suddenly caused him to glance up: the Gypsy Alexander was standing at the corner of the hunting-lodge.

August forgot himself and swore: "What the devil are *you* doing up here?"

"I just got here," Alexander replied. "I was back in the mountains."

"What are you doing here?"

"What do you want to know for? Is that any business of yours?"

"Isn't this supposed to be your day for smoking salmon?"

"I'm all finished with that. And if there's anything else you'd like to know, ask me and I'll tell you!"

"You'd better clear out of here," said August, turning back to his measuring.

Alexander stood still. He glared more and more angrily at the other's back. "Well, I'll be damned!" he said. "Say, what are you doing up here yourself?"

August turned and stared at him. "What's that? Me?"

"For you got here just in time to prevent me from heaving a certain druggist down into the valley below."

"Say, I'll have you put behind bars!" said August.

The Gypsy showed his white teeth in a wild laugh. "You'd better keep a civil tongue in your head," he grated. "For I can just as well heave you over the edge instead."

"One move out of you and I'll drop you dead as a stone," warned August, aiming his revolver.

The Gypsy began walking down the road in the direction of home, shrugging his shoulders, jabbering to himself and wildly waving his arms.

August returned the revolver to his pocket, completed his measurements and noted down a few figures. As cool as a cucumber. He could have despatched the poor Gypsy man in the wink of an eye.

He stared out across the wide mountain lake. The bay here looked like the harbour entrance to some sea port or other, and, by a wild stretch of the imagination, it reminded him of Rio. A fish leaped out there in the water. Wonder how fish could have found their way clear up here? . . . Now and then a splash and a circle of ripples marring the glassy surface of the lake. . . .

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

A NEIGHBOUR lad came to see Benjamin in the movie theatre and it developed that they were in league in some secret matter; they huddled together, whispered and came to some sort of agreement. . . .

The time was at hand, according to the old folk up in North Parish; it was the right quarter of the moon and the weather was fine and it wouldn't interfere with the mowing. They had originally planned a party of three, but now there would be only two of them in order not to split the good luck too many ways. Besides, nothing could be worse than that there should be too many in the party, for that would frighten the underworld folk away, according to the aged ones up in North Parish. . . .

On Sunday they visited the altar and afterward they neither touched tobacco nor had anything to do with a girl—they walked in paths of righteousness. At eight o'clock they ate their supper, each at home, and met at the appointed place. With that, they set out on their mission.

They chose neither path nor road, but went stealing in through the forest as long as there were trees, later clambering up over rough country where there were heaped boulders and deep fissures carved out by rock-slides and where progress was difficult indeed. After a time they sat down to rest.

"I don't suppose we're committing a sin by doing this?" inquired Benjamin who was of an innocent turn of mind.

No, his comrade was unafraid. They were following the wisdom of the old folk, weren't they? And they had made no mistake in carrying out directions: they were wearing

their shirts wrong-side-out, they carried no blade of any description, and each had three juniper berries carefully tucked in his pocket.

They got out the gifts they had brought along for the fairy creature they would meet and inspected them: brand-new articles which had never seen use by Christian man or woman, articles they had bought at the store in Segelfoss where everything in the world was for sale. Having earned good wages this summer Benjamin had bought a silver heart on a chain, and his companion, not to be outdone, had provided himself with a silver ring. Ay, they were well-equipped for the encounter.

They rose and resumed their journey, continued their rugged climb. They were not to arrive at the steep at any particular hour; they were simply to take their time and to take pains to be not out of breath when they reached their destination, lest they forget what they were about. They had until twelve o'clock. There were a great many details to remember.

Coming to the steep, they hunted about until they found a likely looking fissure in the face of the mountain through which it would be easy for the underworld people to slip in and out, and there they sat down to wait. Silently they sat for an hour. The night was light, the sun was still shining against the tallest summits, but with the passage of another hour, time began to drag heavily for them. They looked about, but the sun had disappeared entirely and the light had begun to fail.

"If only we haven't made any mistakes," said Benjamin.

"Unless we have some kind of steel on us," hinted his friend. "And you're sure you've no holes in your pocket?"

They both felt in their pockets, and there were the three juniper berries intact and the only steel they had on them was in the cleats they wore on the heels of their shoes, but these were permitted.

When twelve o'clock had passed without anything having happened they got up and went home. Benjamin had a few days' work left to do in the theatre and it would be necessary for him to be up at six o'clock.

This was only the first night's test. They would have to come back tomorrow night and the next without tobacco or girls until they had achieved their aim.

Benjamin's fellow-neophyte nodded and said that, for himself, he was sure they would meet the fairy. It was her way when moving from mountain to mountain to come up out of the ground, he had heard. "And that's when we are supposed to hold out our hands to her," he added.

"Ay," said Benjamin.

Night after night they continued their faithful vigil and on Saturday they had but two nights left to go—the rules of the game required that their test should include two Sunday nights. Benjamin was beginning to show the effects of this business of nightly vigil lasting from supper to midnight, for it was necessary for him to rise early from bed each morning. Nevertheless he was sustained by the hopes held out by his friend. On Saturday Cornelia came to visit him in the movie house; she cried out her joy at finding him again, for she had been to his home to look for him, had inquired after him there in town, had made inquiries along the street—and how awful folk had acted—they had winked one eye at her and laughed.

"What do you want of me?" asked Benjamin curtly, for it was forbidden him to have anything to do with a girl.

"Ho, what do I want of you!" Cornelia replied quite meekly. "I was just passing and stopped in here to see you."

"Well, go on home again!" he commanded her.

Cornelia stood there for a moment, speechless. Then she began to cry, paced back and forth and at length came out with a question. "Is it because of that Hendrik you're mad at me?" she asked.

Benjamin did not reply.

Cornelia: "Oh, so then it's true that you're to have one of the housemaids up at the Manor?"

Benjamin let slip an exclamation. "What!" he cried.

"Do you think I don't know all about it? It's all over the parish just what kind of a fellow you are, that you have both her and me!"

Benjamin hopped up and down in his tracks; it was forbidden him to defend himself and there stood Cornelia with her head full of piffle, spoiling his chances utterly. From sheer exasperation he threw down his trowel and scrambled out of the building. And when he came out onto the street, he ran. . . .

Saturday night passed as had the others; they sat by the steep and waited, but nothing happened. They were unable to comprehend it; they had kept close watch of the fissure which scored the mountain wall, but it had not opened wider and no one had issued forth from the bowels of the earth.

Benjamin was chagrined over the episode with Cornelia and at length he was urged to confess. He had said nothing, had merely asked her to go, but Cornelia herself had come out with the usual piffle. Could that have caused things to go wrong?

His comrade was in doubt, but no, so long as it had not been Benjamin's own fault and as he had not kissed her and chucked her under the chin. . . .

"Ay, but that's what she wanted," Benjamin confessed. "And that's what I wanted myself. Do you suppose that could have been wrong?"

His comrade, assailed by fresh doubts: "I wonder!"

When they had arrived back home, Benjamin whispered that now he was through looking for the fairy. His comrade, however, managed to talk him into changing his mind; they had but one night left to go, the second Sunday night; no one knew what might happen—they had surely been faithful and it was possible that the under-

world folk could see inside one's heart. It was worth trying. . . .

And so the lads went out to the steep this last night as well, and it is more than probable that their hopes ran higher than ever, as this was the second Sunday night. And there they sat gazing up at the sheer mountain wall with such concentration that they both developed stiff necks. Occasionally, to break the monotony, they would point and say in a spirit of good-natured fun: "Look there, it seems to me I see——"

But nothing seemed to help.

Well, but something happened, after all. . . .

As it was a difficult route home by way of rocky slope and forest, they agreed, now that their trial was over, to climb up to that new road of the Consul's and follow that as far as the main road through the parish. A splendid saving of time, as it took them only a half-hour to scale the precipitous face of the mountain!

Suddenly, upon reaching the top, they heard a cry. It had come from a point some hundred yards distant, had risen for a moment, then died away, as though sucked down into the earth.

"What was that?" the lads whispered to each other and possibly a quick thought of the underworld flashed through their minds. They were foolhardy enough to stand still listening as though hoping to hear the cry again; worse, they sat right down to listen. At length Benjamin's friend recklessly advanced and he had barely reached the point whence the cry had issued before he waved frantically for Benjamin to come and see.

It was now an hour past midnight, light in the sky and warm. Benjamin took his place by the side of his comrade and looked.

And together they saw. . . .

Benjamin immediately recognized the lady. He had seen her during the time he was working for Altmulig

down in the garage; she had stopped in to watch him at work—it was the Consul's sister, the one named Marna. The man was unknown to them; but, even so, his face was so scratched and bloody he looked like nothing at all. If the couple had had a battle, it was anyway over now—both parties were standing back to back arranging their clothes.

The two lads remained standing where they were: they didn't even have sense enough to be on their way. The man picked his cap from the ground, turned and seemed anxious to say something, but, the very moment he discovered two strangers watching him, he bowed and ran away. The lady, on the other hand, had no look of being forsaken—she took plenty of time to arrange both her clothes and her hair, brushed dirt and bits of dry stubble from her skirt, stared the two young spectators straight in the eye, and, when she felt she was ready, walked straight past them as though they had been less than the dust beneath her feet.

An endless round of duties for August. No one seemed careful to spare him, though he was in dire need of free time in which to manage his personal affairs. At length he was through at the blacksmith shop and had resumed his duties as foreman of the road gang. Meanwhile, however, as he had been assailed by many worries and had sought relief in a life of simple piety, he no longer relished bossing men about as he had formerly.

"Look here now, lads," he said on Monday morning. "In just two weeks this road must be finished and ready for the Consul's car—I've given my word on this, and you all know what we have left to do. There's no sense whatever in coming to work Monday morning all played out after spending the entire weekend dancing and sinning in other ways. And besides that, you don't get here on time," he added with a glance at his watch.

Boldemand, no longer foreman, came late to work, his face bearing signs of dissipation and August was quick to reprimand him. But the worst offender of all was Adolf—he turned up a full half-hour late. “What in God’s name have *you* been up to!” asked August. “How did you get your face all scratched up like that?”

“I fell down and skinned it,” replied Adolf, turning his face to one side.

“One thing after another!” muttered his boss. “You get yourself all dressed up fine on Sundays, I’ve been told, and make the rest of us look like tramps. I didn’t think it of you, Adolf—the idea of fighting on the Holy Sabbath. You look as though somebody had been over your face with a harrow. I certainly thought that the spring planting would be over by this time.”

The other workmen laughed at this, and Adolf looked like a whipped dog. He picked up his drill and sledge hammer and went to his work.

During the forenoon conditions improved up there on the road; backs became more supple, arms began to swing more lustily and the good spirits of the men returned. But Adolf dallied along and wasn’t half himself.

“What ails you?” asked his working mate who was handling the hammer. “You aren’t holding the drill steady. You even forget to turn it.”

Adolf uttered no reply.

After drilling four holes, they were ready to blast. August walked up the road, measured, figured things out, estimated the extent of the danger zone. “Blaa-aa-st—ho!” he shouted. The workmen round about sought sheltered spots. Four charges were to be fired simultaneously. “Light up!” cried August.

When Adolf had fired the last fuse he stood still for a moment to make sure that it was smoking. Why didn’t he run away? The workmen peered at him from their shelters, noted his behaviour with amazement, and promptly began shouting at him. Suddenly Adolf hoists himself

atop the ledge, the very one about to be shattered. He sits astride the charge, the fuse smoking between his legs. Now what in Heaven's name——! The men round about yell at him, no longer give a thought to their own safety, but step out into the open, jump up and down, wave their arms wildly, shout, fume, and curse. It is a matter of seconds. The first charge goes off with a boom, the second follows immediately. Adolf remains seated on the ledge. A shower of granite chips rises in the air and falls all about his ears; he bends forward a bit and raises his hands to his face, but continues to occupy his seat. The third charge goes off and Adolf is no longer unscathed. Nevertheless, he continues to sit there. At the last minute, like a streak, a man rushes out to him, grabs him with both hands and hauls him from the ledge—it is the Trønder Francis. Just at that moment the fourth charge goes off.

The men stream out of hiding and find them lying in a welter of gravel and broken rock—naturally, they had not got far enough away and the final explosion had laid them low. Nevertheless, the worst had apparently not taken place—it had been the air pressure more than anything else which had fetched them. Francis, at least, was able to raise himself up on one elbow. After spitting the gravel from his mouth, he managed to growl: "Say, if there's any life left in Adolf there, give him a good wallop for me!" Whereupon Francis fell back prostrate again.

Neither man was good for much after his experience. Adolf had to be carried down to the bunk-house in an empty tool-chest and it took two men to hold him up before Francis was able to walk, but both were dull in the head and thoroughly done out—— Both had received broken bones; they groaned but they did not talk. By way of damage, Adolf had two wounds in his head and a fractured shoulder, whereas Francis had had several ribs broken when he had been thrown to the ground by the charge—his head was whole, however.

Both were sent to the hospital in Bodø.

The accident was the subject of no end of discussion in town and the *Segelfoss News* carried a special article about it. It was a question whether Adolf, after his release from the hospital, might not be obliged to spend some time in an asylum, as his singular conduct during the explosion of the four blasting charges had been indicative of a temporary mental disorder. His fellow-worker, Francis, had behaved like a hero and was deserving of the greatest of praise.

At length things settled down again, but two of the ablest members of the road-crew had been laid up. Resolutely, August took on both Benjamin and the latter's comrade in nocturnal adventure. They could take no part in the blasting operations, but they were able lads and could help at graveling the surface.

Again Gammelmoderen comes to consult the oracle, August. She is at a fresh crisis and—dear Altmulig, this time the situation is more dire than ever. . . .

August, who surely had worries enough of his own, opened the interview by asking: "Have you done what I told you to do last time? Have you prayed to God?"

No, Gammelmoderen admitted. But, at all events, last evening a tall dark man had made an attempt to slip in by way of her window, even though the window was closed. There he had stood outside, though it was a second-storey window and all that, so he must have climbed up the outside of the house! Who ever heard of such a thing! And then he had knocked on the glass, and her mistake had been that she had opened the window to talk some sense into the fellow, whereupon he had grabbed her. They had grappled there in the window, yes, and in the end he had been compelled to drop to the ground. . . . Oh, but then he had stood there below and drawn out his knife and shown it to her and threatened her most horribly—and look there, just see what he had done to her! Marks on

her face, and her arms and breast were all black and blue, so that now she couldn't show herself in public but would have to sit in her room and brood over her terrible misfortune, and now—dear Altmulig—what was she to do?

August gave the matter some thought and at length he said: "It would be a good thing to ask help of the Lord."

Gammelmoderen answered hesitantly: "Yes. To be sure. But tell me one thing, Altmulig, was that any way to act? Is he a human being or is he a beast?"

August: "He must have been drunk."

"And now you must go and get hold of him for me."

August shook his head and doubted that this would do any good.

"Won't it do any good? But something must be done, mustn't it? Am I not to be able to stay here at all? I shall give him a little warning, that's what I'll do!" Gammelmoderen threatened. "For it's my desire to be like other decent people," she said, half sobbing over the helplessness of her position.

This was more than August could stand. He thought for a long time, as though loath to consider the most obvious solution to the problem. "I see no other way but for me to shoot him," he said at length.

"What? No, you can't do that."

"Can't? Such would be the very least of my tricks," said August. . . .

But the man in question was not to be shot; by a lucky stroke, he was able to demonstrate his exceeding talent as a veterinarian and, in the space of a few minutes, his star had risen to eclipse even that of August himself.

It so happened that one of the horses fell ill, Marna's saddle horse. It had developed colic from eating too much green grass and there it stood in the yard, its belly distended like that of a drum. Marna was not at home—no, Marna had gone away—but all the other people of the

Manor had gathered about the mare—the Consul and Fru Juliet, Gammelmoderen, the housekeeper and her maids, as well as those of the children who had learned to walk. The gardener Steffen was at his wit's end; he had “stirred up” the horse, he had “rolled” the horse, but at length it had refused to move a step. There it stood, its legs spread stiffly apart, its eyes dull and listless—now and then it would make a feeble attempt to kick its own belly.

From the door of the smokehouse the Gypsy Alexander must have noted this cluster of people standing about in the yard, for he had come at once to find out what was up. No one made anything of his arrival and when he asked a question or two, the gardener Steffen merely mumbled one thing or another to get rid of him.

“Here, hold the horse tight by the bit!” he commanded Steffen. His black eyes bored into the suffering animal; he stroked her here and there, pinched up the skin, felt for the ribs and counted these till he came to the one in the middle. Then he began from the other end and counted back until he had fixed upon a definite point. . . .

What, was that a knife he had hidden in that right sleeve of his? Before the spectators were able to catch a quick breath, the Gypsy had thrust the knife up to the hilt into the side of the suffering mare. “No, but——” panted someone in the crowd. It was Gammelmoderen. The others stood there speechless.

Alexander made no move to withdraw the blade; no, he pressed it hard to one side in the wound and forced an opening. Very little blood appeared, but there was a steady rush of escaping gas.

The mare stood stock still; she had hardly winced at the stab she had received. After a few moments the swelling had delicately subsided. Alexander now found it necessary to press the blade against the opposite side of the wound where he held it for a few minutes. With that he

withdrew the knife, wiped it off on the grass, walked around, looked the mare in the eyes and nodded.

The gardener Steffen let slip an oath. "The devil and all!" he said.

The mare now began to move about and no longer cared to be held. She lowered her head and began snorting at the ground.

Alexander gave Steffen further orders. "Put her in a box stall for a few hours and don't let her have anything to eat."

"And about that wound?"

"That's nothing to bother her. Smear a little raw tar on it if you want."

Fru Juliet asked in amazement: "What, is she quite well again?"

"Ay," Alexander replied.

The mare was patted and stroked by children and grown-folk and when she was led back into the stable, the old animation had returned to her eyes. The children followed her in to the stall.

"Thank you, Alexander!" said the Consul.

"Yes, wasn't it clever of him though!" Fru Juliet enthused. "Alexander certainly knows how to do a thing or two!"

Suddenly Gammelmoderen thrusts in a pointed remark: "Sometimes he knows how to do a thing too many. Climbing the walls of houses, for example."

"What's that he can do?"

"Climb right up the outside of a house. As far as the second storey."

"Well, I never!"

"And if certain little boys I know should see him do it and try to do it themselves, they'd fall and break their necks."

"No, that will never do, Alexander!" said Fru Juliet.

"All right," he replied and stalked off.

All had heard this brief exchange; Blonda and Stina had stood there and pricked up their ears. Yes, Gammelmoderen had seized her opportunity and had struck a blow for her own peace. She felt relieved in her mind, she was pleased with herself and she said lightly: "Well, what are we standing here for now? The patient has left and the doctor has left!" Turning to Fru Juliet, she said: "Now, Juliet, you must write Marna all about this."

"Must Marna be written about this?" asked Gordon Tidemand. "Where was she off to, leaving in such haste?"

Gammelmoderen: "She's gone to Helgeland, I suppose?"

"Yes, I shall write her," said Fru Juliet. "She's in Bodø!"

When August came to hear of Alexander's miraculous act of horse surgery, he let it be known that he himself had become too religious to take on such jobs at present and that he was glad some one had been found to perform the work for him. Furthermore, he was out of practice; it had been so long since he had operated on a horse for colic—the last time had been in Sumatra in 1903! But before that he had cured horses suffering from colic both in the north and in the south.

It was easily possible that this old handy man about the place had dabbled a bit in veterinary arts as well, for such would surely be like him. But Alexander had acquired his knowledge from his ancient wandering tribe and had developed his technique to a truly marvelous degree. He had not learned such tricks from books.

"Ay," said August. "But the fellow who taught me how to stab a horse like that was a full-blooded man in his country. He drove the Lord High President's coach-and-four and otherwise had fifty horses to look after. He used to cure colic with a knife every time."

Alexander determined at once to cross-examine this

crazy braggart: Where had he stabbed? How far forward and how far back? How high up and how low down? In other words, name the exact point!

August crumpled. He didn't remember, it had been so long ago. But no less wide-awake and inquiring than he had been all his life was he now—he countered by asking Alexander to name *him* the point.

"Hohoho!" laughed Alexander. "So you can go ahead and ruin certain horses, eh? You imagine that it's simply a question of stabbing in a particular spot! But have you ever looked inside a horse and seen the place to let out the wind? And do you know how far in to stick the knife? Go on, shut up, you bald-headed old fossil!"

But this marvelous Gypsy art must have appealed strongly to August's mind, for he ignored the other's insult and said eagerly: "I'll pay you to tell me!"

"Ho, you? What have you got to pay with?" asked Alexander.

"I'm expecting some money."

"Don't talk rot!" . . .

But August's prestige was restored in quite another quarter, and by the chief himself.

Now Gordon Tidemand was a learned man and a consul; he had attended school in many foreign lands and he was educated in both language and accountancy, but he was nevertheless compelled to seek frequent counsel with that able mother of his. And on this very day he comes to her with a telegram in his hand—splendid herring at Værø, shoals running strong. "We must send our own seiners out at once," he said. "We've need for haste——"

Gammelmoderen, startled: "What! Herring at this time of year?"

"That's what it says here."

"Yes, but—— Who is this Ellingsen?"

"My agent," said Gordon Tidemand. "I have my agents out, you know."

His mother: "I think you'd better go see Altmulig about this, that's what I think you'd better do."

Gordon Tidemand went at once to August. But his conversation with his mother had rendered him cautious. "Is this telegram anything to bother about?" he asked casually.

August adjusted his *pince-nez* and glanced at the despatch. "I can't make it out," he said.

"Eh?"

"Herring now? And at Værø?"

Gordon Tidemand took back the telegram and thrust it carelessly into his pocket.

"It doesn't sound reasonable," continued August, thoughtfully. "If it had said . . . pardon, Herr Consul, can I see it again!"

August read the telegram over once more, nodded and said in that emphatic manner of his: "This is a mistake in copying, that's all. It should read 'pollack' in place of 'herring'." *

"Is that possible?"

"Ay, Herr Consul, that's right. It's pollack that's meant. That makes both the season of the year and Værø come out right. But I don't suppose you've any use for pollack?"

"Not that I know of. What do you think?"

"Not as I can see. And besides, pollack—ay, from pollack you get stockfish and liver—otherwise there isn't much sense in pollack. None at all. But Heaven forgive my sinful words, how I talk! The pollack is also one of God's gifts to us, the grace and mercy of the Lord——"

"All right. Thanks, Altmulig. I know where to come when I'm in need of expert advice."

* *Sild*=herring. *Sei*=pollack (*pollachius carbonarius*), a fish belonging to the cod family. Also known as "coalfish."—Translator.

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

AUGUST'S money had not arrived. He had received no word from Polden; no, for he had written no letter in the first place.

Was there no possible way, then, for him to lay hands on this money? One day he had tried to consult Aase on the matter, but she had tendered him no advice. That obscure hocus-pocus of hers, that of lifting up her clothes and staring into his eyes, had been merely a trick on her part to substantiate her knowledge of his fondness for a certain young lady of South Parish. And his shock had been such that he had stood rooted to the spot.

Aase, that tall dark woman in Lappish garb, wandering about from house to house listening to folk's words and seeing into their minds—it was not strange that she should have known much and that she had cast a truth in August's teeth. Was he himself unaware of the truth, then? Perhaps so and perhaps not. From the depths of his own mendacity, it was likewise possible that he might have lied to himself. He was so like an imaginary being, intangible as smoke in the air. But in private, he might have turned to the wall and whispered something to himself.

Nevertheless, his delirium notwithstanding, August had both feet on the ground. He had discovered trout in the remote and neglected mountain lake up by the hunting lodge. It was a mystery how they had ever found their way up into its waters, for no trout could have possibly negotiated the falls below. But there they were, and August now had it in mind to interest the Consul in hauling a small boat up to the lake as soon as the road should

be finished. Then there would be sport fishing to offer the English lord on his visit. Oh yes, August had a brain in his head.

Then might not it also be possible for the old rascal to find some special way of achieving his personal ambition? With money in his pocket, his word would have been law, he would have been in a position to shine, to reach about him and change conditions. And what if he were actually to win the girl? Without money, he would be obliged to seek other remedies for the present situation. . . . On many scores August had begun to lay great store by a religious life. By degrees he had come to consider the possible effects of baptism in the river below the falls. That old horse-trader, possibly he had something special in mind with all this piety of his—such would not be beneath him! But wasn't it fate itself which was against him? Who had ever seen anything to equal it! He was sick at heart, he had lost all courage and enterprise, for Cornelia had been in town a day or two ago and, passing the blacksmith shop, had pretended not to see him inside. To such a stage had things progressed! Many a man has taken to religion with less grounds! Nor had he been entirely lacking in religious spirit before; the devil and all if he had! But now that he was in love, there was more to religion than simply making the sign of the cross.

He inquired of the small dealer who had succumbed to the urge for second baptism if he felt himself a better and happier man as the result of his experience.

Oh yes, the merchant had observed quite a change.

Relief from the anguish of worrying over moneys owed him which he was unable to collect?

Oh yes, one thing with another.

"What I wanted to ask," continued August, "is it true that such a baptism will help out a man in love? Will it help him so much as a hair?"

"What's that?"

"I'm not asking for myself; I'm asking for that Benjamin up in North Parish. He's afraid he's losing his girl and that makes him feel sick and discouraged. He's working for me and I was wondering if it would help him to get himself baptised? If the Lord would step in and let him have the girl?"

"Hm! Ay, that's possible," said the merchant. "But anyway, it's good for a great many things. Take me, for instance. Tobias from South Parish has begun to do business with me."

"I saw that Cornelia in town a few days ago. Did she buy something from you?"

"I believe so."

August's final question was whether the newly baptised were supposed to kiss each other at the conclusion of the ceremony—did they give each other a kiss of brotherhood, or whatever it was they called it?

"Ay," said the merchant. "Of course, I'm a married man and all that, but I've heard that they kiss each other."

"Shame on them!" said August. . . .

He became more and more religious, more and more concerned with this question of baptism. He was in earnest about it, developed the habit of carrying cold food from the table to eat in the seclusion of his own room; once inside, with the door closed, he would scrape the richest portions to one side in order to enjoy these last and then, at the final moment, deprive himself of these tidbits—instead of eating them himself, he would throw them to the birds. And did the birds make the most of their banquet? Ay, that they did—those little birds of Heaven! An act of kindness, of charity, and God could see into one's heart.

With God's help he found it possible to renounce that money of his, to renounce this entire world of Mammon. And the days passed the same as ever, and he lacked for

neither food nor clothes, and he gave no thought to the day when the mountain road would be finished with the possibility that his job on the place would be over.

However, it was more difficult for him to strike a balance in the problem of love—in that quarter piety was no more helpful than spit. A fine state of affairs! It had never occurred to him for a moment that, as a lover, he was something of anachronism, so youthful he was at heart. He could support a wife and children in splendid style, provided his job were to continue. And he would make a good husband; he was no niggard by nature and he would deny his wife nothing within reason. That miserable disparity of age, the thing which was standing between him and his Cornelia—why, in this particular case, with a bit of good will, it could easily be disregarded. Had such things never happened before? Hadn't the newspapers he had read and the many experiences he had had in this world taught him that far worse conditions existed? What about the innocent young girls who married rich old men on their death beds for the mere purpose of inheriting their fortunes? August groaned to contemplate anything quite so repulsive. Think of it—marrying a man on his death bed!

Aase was right, he did want this girl. And it would take little or nothing to arouse his jealousy and make him play the fool. One day, coming upon Benjamin carving his initials, along with Cornelia's, in the bark of a birch tree beside the new road, August stepped up and, under threat of losing his job, gave him orders to scrape out what he had carved there. Though Benjamin was reluctant to do so and said, "It almost looks as if things were over between us!" he obeyed the order. Later he smiled happily as he told his boss about a certain silver heart on a chain he was going to give Cornelia that evening.

August flared at once: "Haven't I told you that you should marry one of your own girls up in North Parish?"

And yes, Benjamin recalled the advice, but such would be impossible, as Cornelia was the maid of his choice.

"Then let me tell you this," said August, "if you give Cornelia that silver heart, a day won't go by before she's given it to that Hendrik."

But August was unconvincing. "I don't believe it," said Benjamin.

If it had not been that Benjamin was indispensable on the road just then, it is certain that August would have fired him.

This lad from North Parish filled August with dark resentment simply because he was stubborn enough to hold fast to his sweetheart. A lad August had provided with work and good wages—where was his sense of gratitude! Why, August was nourishing a viper! This fellow who carved initials in trees, no doubt he had also in some similar way dedicated the new cement floor of the movie house? And when the cement set, the writing would remain there as long as the floor! It was a good thing for him he hadn't tried a trick like that to begin with! It was another matter that August had himself, by means of certain hieroglyphics inscribed in soft cement, made the floor of the Consul's garage something of a monument to his own tender sentiments. He had hidden his efforts in the corner where he himself had been working and they constituted no more than a friendly greeting, but Benjamin had probably sniffed them out, none the less. The devil's own nose on that lad!

It irritated August to find himself wasting so much time upon Benjamin, to find himself compelled to regard him as a rival. Such made him feel mundane and such disturbed his dream life and he would have to find some way of patching up this damage to his soul. On Sunday he went to the schoolhouse in South Parish to attend a prayer meeting held by the reverend Baptist gentleman. The moment was embarrassing for him, and, taking a seat

as far back as possible, August endeavoured to avoid all people he knew. But the room was literally filled with them. Cornelia was there, but she did not see him; Hendrik was there; Gina i Roten was there and sang. August found nothing to his choice in the sermon; the text was taken from the Scripture and had mostly to do with: Come, come, while the gracious arms of the Lord are still open to receive you! . . . "Take note of this, good people," the preacher went on to say, "the solstice has long passed and we can no longer expect fine weather and sun. My advice to all of you who up until now have merely harboured the thought: come this very day and get yourselves baptised. It is now twelve o'clock—in an hour we shall meet by the river——"

This was too short notice and August got up and went home.

But whilst crossing the bridge, he suffered a change of heart. Possibly it was inadvisable to postpone the matter further and thus lose out on the entire deal. He therefore turned back.

He fell in with some others who were going his way, among them Blonda and Stina, the two parlour-maids up at the Manor. August did not relish being seen by them, but he was in any event glad that the road workers were keeping to themselves. And there came both Cornelia and Hendrik who, although they were already baptised, had nevertheless come to view again the sacred ceremony.

"What's this I see!" said Cornelia, "Are you too to be baptised?"

"I'm giving it a bit of a thought," answered August.

Oh no, he had nothing against so holy a thing as baptism. Who could tell, maybe there was something in it, after all! Cornelia and many others had gone religious and yielded to second baptism, so why should he hold back?

Said briefly, he followed the herd.

Several stood there ahead of him, among these, Blonda

and Stina, so there couldn't be a very complicated ceremony where the individual was concerned. Furthermore, the two old girls had been here before and had learned what to do to get ready; with no further ado, they took off their shoes and stockings and rolled up their skirts. Their last move was to remove their chemises.

Damp spray and a bitter wind swept down from the waterfall above and, though the sun was shining, here were weather conditions calling rather for oilskins and a sou'wester. August began to vacillate in his mind. But, glancing up, he saw Cornelia with her eyes riveted upon him.

When his turn arrived, the baptist said: "Take your shoes off!"

Too late now for August to withdraw, so he pulled off his shoes and socks and rolled his trousers up above his knees.

"Take off your coat, take off your vest and take off your shirt!" said the baptist in a voice pompous and ceremonious. August obeyed. With that the two men stepped out into the water and August's soul was saved. Three times he was ducked—in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost. Amen.

The water was horribly cold.

He dried himself as well as he could and got back into his clothes. And yes, Cornelia had had her eyes fastened on him the entire time; she had gazed skeptically at him, but now she was forced to believe in him. She came over to him, a kindly look on her face and was ready to leave the place in his company.

August was embarrassed. "Ay, and what do you think of me now?" he asked.

What did she think of him——?

Ay, taken all in all. "That was one experience I never went through before, in spite of all the places I've been," he said.

Yes, she supposed it was.

But the water was frightfully cold, he said. It would have been better if he had got himself baptised in Tahiti, he said.

His teeth were chattering.

He would get over it, right enough, she thought. Just as the others had.

"But the others are so much younger," he said. "I'm just old junk, you know."

No, she reckoned he was nothing of the kind.

"What's that? Don't you think so, Cornelia?"

She preferred not to go into the matter, but she was kind in her manner to him the whole time and thought that he had done the right thing in having himself baptised.

"No, I'm really not so broken down as you think," he asserted, straightening up and attempting to prove himself free of decrepitude. "I'm high and low and all over on that new road of ours," he boasted, "and I've yet to see the man who can give me one under the ear without my shooting him down like a dog."

Hendrik stood in the offing, his face as sour as swill, for here was one day he was not to have Cornelia. He appeared displeased over the fact that August had now been baptised and could thus appear on equal terms with him. "I say, Cornelia, hadn't we better be getting home?" he asked.

"No," she said. "I'm going home the way I came. Just you go on alone, Hendrik!" Frank words, a clear dismissal. But with that, she turned to August and inquired after Benjamin.

Benjamin? Oh, he was at work.

Where? For yesterday she had been in town and she had learned he was through in the theatre.

"What do you want of him?" asked August, disagreeably. "He isn't baptised like we are."

No, what did she want of him exactly——

She was simply not to disturb him right now, said August. He was busy with an important piece of work which demanded his entire attention.

Where?

No matter. But he was earning good money. Naturally it was August who had to show him everything and tell him what to do, for he was far from being a wizard when it came to brains.

He was? That Benjamin?

Yes. He was a sheep. And he could hardly be called good-looking, either. But August had promised to help him and he would keep his promise.

Cornelia was silent for a few moments, then asked if August might be good enough to carry her greetings to Benjamin?

Greetings? No, what for? He hadn't been baptised or anything. August would most likely forget to take him her greetings. He had so much to carry about in his head. He was the Consul's right-hand man in all his undertakings. What he had meant to say was, she could now give him a nice sisterly kiss after the baptism, couldn't she?

Cornelia paled and said no.

"After the baptism, I meant. Now that we are both baptised. I'm just like you and yours now," he said.

"Well, I guess I'll have to be getting on home," she said and turned on her heel.

Long nose. . . .

He could have followed her, couldn't he? Ho, he? August? As though he didn't know how to deal with a young and timid girl! But he really didn't feel up to it; no, in truth, he wasn't even as well as he might be. The cold waters of Jordan and the draught of wind from the waterfall had chilled him to the bone. He began running to warm his blood, but he was soon tired and out of breath and forced to return to a walk. Damned if he didn't feel pretty miserable—heaven forgive that tongue of his!

In the field outside their sleeping quarters a goodly number of the road crew had gathered in a crowd. August, returning from his baptism and decidedly ill, hurried past in order to get home and to bed. As usual, they had been to a dance the night before, he had heard, and it was apparent that they were carrying their merrymaking over into Sunday. Possibly there was also strong drink in the crowd, for the men were rushing around shouting in each other's faces. Certain females were likewise in evidence—girls from the town. Valborg from Øira and her husband were there, as well. Someone was playing the accordion over by the new road.

August piled all his blankets on the bed and crawled under them fully dressed.

He could not fall asleep and he did not grow warm; he lay dozing and thinking over the various happenings of the day. No doubt he could have kissed Blonda and Stina without much trouble, but that would not be the same thing, and the thought of doing so merely for the purpose of piquing Cornelia would never have entered his mind, for he was not that sort. . . .

Suddenly he hears a couple of sharp yells. They had originated somewhere outside. What was going on? Yells from the field where the road gangs had gathered. August raises himself up on one elbow and listens. He hears sounds of commotion, springs out of bed and rushes over to the window. Right he had been—a gang-fight! These howls and angry yells had struck a familiar chord in his memory—thus in the old days had bandits and other marauding folk howled—unforgettable sounds beneath a southern sky. . . .

He leaps out-of-doors and hastens to the scene of battle.

Two rival gangs of workers are at each other's throats; women are fluttering about here and there making futile attempts to stop the fighting, children are watching

from a safe distance, but the doctor's two sons are perilously close to the danger zone.

Hm, an honest-to-goodness brawl or mere monkey-shines? August wondered to himself, wrinkling his brow and joining the spectators. Nothing much to it, he decided. They fling their arms and legs about, but nobody seems to get hurt. Hey, there Boldemand landed one, but he's too drunk to accomplish much. Ho, there he landed another! Not bad, after all! . . . Ugh, such a way to fight—are they hitting each other in the chest? No, not even that, they are using their feet—kicking! Are they crazy? Why don't they knock out each other's teeth? And isn't there a single one among them who knows how to wade in with both fists?

August pulls himself together and debates whether to join the *mêlée* or remain on the sidelines, an interested spectator. He makes pugnacious gestures in the air with his arms to show them the way, leans to one side and peers, laughs aloud when a blow lands home, mutters to himself when an attack falls flat. Shameful, shameful, to go at it like that! It should have been me that had that grip on him! Look at that tall giant, Petter—he's no good! Away with you, Petter! You're spoiling the whole fight by pretending you're really bleeding. Do you think that's real blood? That's only blood from your nose—nose blood mixed with tears! Why, if he isn't actually bawling. . . .

Jørn Mathildesen walks over to August and says something. "You look a mite blue in the face. What's the matter, don't you feel well?" He takes a full bottle of hard liquor from his pocket and hands it over to August. Cognac. But August is absorbed in watching the battle's progress, absorbed and absent-minded. Yes, he accepts the bottle and takes a long pull on it, but quite absently, his eyes riveted the whole time upon the raging fight.

"This isn't my bottle," says Jørn Mathildesen, "I was only supposed to hold it. It belongs to that Boldemand.

. . . No, did you ever see such crazy fellows to be fighting like this? Just look there how they're bleeding! It's that Valborg they are after, but Valborg, she won't have anything to do with them——"

August drank again, absently, as though he didn't know what he was doing; however, the art of draining a bottle did not exactly appear alien to him. He continued without interruption to follow the progress of the brawl and, from time to time, he would deliver himself of disparaging remarks relative to the conduct of the contestants: "Look there at that Gustav—there's a man I've had working for me for months now, and he can't even land a punch. To hell with him!" said August, spitting viciously. Absently, he tugged on the bottle again and forgot to hand it back. "Now what in Satan's name—there's a fellow using his cap to slap with! He's slapping faces! Good God, they're just a bunch of babies, nasty little brats. Dear, dear—— Faugh!" This was too much for August, he drew his head down between his shoulders and made himself short to express his disgust. Then suddenly he straightened up and let out a howl. One of the warriors has slipped off his shoe and begins flailing about with this weapon. The shoe is wrenched from his grasp, brought down across his nose and hurriedly thrown away. "What kind of a trick was that!" August was again compelled to express his disgust, was compelled to dance up and down to show how sorely he was annoyed by this pitiful scene. "All he did was lose a shoe, ugh!"

Absently he drank again, got a bit of colour back in his face, a bit of new life, and continued to follow the battle. The whole thing was shallow nonsense. There came the doctor's two sons carrying the lost shoe on the end of a stick, yes, and August was obliged to stand and witness this miserable imitation of a gang-fight! He watched two of the frantic little fighting-cocks make from the scene with a girl between them; they immediately came to a dis-

agreement over her and fell to fighting between themselves. This private encounter proved to be slightly more satisfactory according to August's standards—these lads were truly in a rage and, though one had his ear all but twisted off, he kept on fighting doggedly. But others came up and the affair degenerated into no more than a general mix-up of crazy workmen who knew nothing about fighting. Valborg was playing a game of her own; she had not vanished from the scene. Oh no! On special occasion she would strike a blow herself; otherwise she acted as referee, sometimes screaming encouragement, other times threatening to go away and leave them. She still appeared fresh and charming after the all-night revel and her green and red dress was still as tidy as ever.

They now began striking with keys and stones in their hands, and these proved slightly more effective. What's that, more blood? One man drew a bottle from his pocket. "Well, I'll be ——!" jabbered August. "If he isn't standing there squirting whiskey in the eyes of the others instead of lamming out with the bottle. . . . Hey you, knock him silly! Oh . . ." he wailed. Nothing had happened, he couldn't stand to see more. . . . Such an utter fiasco!

A confused yell arose. "Look. Now they've got out their knives!" explains Jørn Mathildesen.—"Where—who—?" demanded August, running forward a few steps, stooping to peer into the thickest of the battle, leaping up again and crying: "Hurrah! . . . What—what's he standing still with a great big knife like that for?"—"That's Olsen from Namdal."—"Well, what's he standing still for? Where did he get that sweet friendly look on his face from? Isn't he going to use that knife of his? Then what's he got it out for? . . . Look, he just missed a fine chance! Ho, stick it into him and finish him up quick, that's the way to do!" August is desperate in his contempt for the Namdaler who has so kindly a disposition that he

refuses to use a knife on anyone. Yielding to an uncontrollable urge, August pulls his revolver from his pocket and discharges two shots in the air, just to take some part in the combat, to encourage them, to show them . . .

But the shots produce quite the wrong effect: the battle comes to an abrupt halt. August utters a long and lusty yell, but no one is encouraged by that. Some of the men look up, recognize their boss and take the shots as a warning to cease fighting. There is only one who refuses to give in—Boldemand. He even has a hateful scowl on his face as he releases a final kick. His attack but partially succeeds; his kick is aimed too high, it catches his opponent in the belly rather than in the crotch and he himself loses his balance and falls. Fat Boldemand, he is too drunk!

Silence falls over the field.

August is hurt to the quick; never before in all his travels has he stood witness to such namby-pamby child's play. "It should have been me!" he keeps repeating to himself. "But now I'm too old!"

He took several more powerful gulps from the bottle, let out his breath and said: "Now they stand around thinking what bold brave lads they have been. They have fought so hard, they have tried to kill each other. Oh well. But there isn't a single one of them left lying out there on the field, is there! Yes sir, it should have been me!" He held up the bottle to see how much there was left in it, and observing that there was very little—the bottle was hardly quarter-full—he absently put it back to his lips and, his thoughts far away, began swallowing. When the bottle was empty, he held it out in his hand.

He has begun shivering again and his lips are once more blue. He is on the point of taking another drink from the bottle when he suddenly realizes what he is doing and holds it out to be rid of it. Jørn Mathildesen repeats that it is not his bottle, that he had merely been asked to

hold it, that it was really that Boldemand's bottle. August continues to hold it out to him, shakes his head and grins foolishly at Jørn's remark. It is as though he is simply refusing to drink another drop. And all the while his thoughts are on other matters; he continues to chatter about the recent fray, abuses his workers with the most sarcastic of language, suddenly becomes touched by something, half-sobs with self-pity and, utterly crushed, says: "No, I'm too old, too old!" At length he merely mumbles incoherently, almost like a man who is drunk.

And then he sank to the ground. . . .

But possibly it was just because he had drunk that bottle of cognac and was carried home to bed that he had been saved from serious illness. His two Baptist sisters, Blonda and Stina, put him to bed with a hot-water bottle, covered him over with heavy wool blankets and nursed him through the entire night. He lay drenched with sweat and slept for fifteen hours.

CHAPTER NINETEEN

DRUGGIST Holm stepped into Fru Hagen's house one day, bowed and said: "Thank you, I'm well indeed. And you?"

The lady glanced at him laughingly and said: "You monkey, you!"

Holm: "Granted! I said that merely to turn aside your anger with me because it has been so long since I have been here. Nor did I utter a lie when I said I was well. And you?"

Fru Hagen scrutinized him. "Well well, I see you've been calling on Vendt of the hotel again."

"Not to any great extent, hardly a trace of that! No, but I've been into so many things. For example, I simply can not be rid of that accursed widow of Solmund's."

"Widow Solmund?" Fru Hagen reflects and shakes her head.

"The lady I turned over to the welfare agency for the reason that I could not go on feeding her and her children."

"Well, what about her?"

"It's like this: I am on a leisurely and innocent walk in North Parish. Suddenly I see the widow approaching. But she has seen me first—she is wringing her hands and wiping the tears from her eyes. Wasn't it possible for me to help her? If only I knew how in need she was! Now from that day to this, I have simply not set foot in North Parish. There is something unsavoury about that section of town. Don't you think so yourself? There is something so depressing about it. How much more charming and cosy it is to find oneself in South Parish, for instance. Eh, what? Nor is it so dark and gloomy there, either."

"But then, I suppose you also go for an occasional walk up the Consul's new road?" asks Fru Hagen.

Holm sits there breathing for a few moments. "But I believe we were speaking of South Parish. Of the two sections of town, I really much prefer South Parish. I am left to walk in peace in South Parish. No signs of a widow Solmund down there, and on my way home in the evening I hear Gina i Roten singing that superb cow-call of hers from the knoll."

"I never got to hear that cow-call of hers."

"And today, heaven help me if the widow Solmund didn't come to see me at the drugstore!" Holm continued. "At the drugstore! And that's the reason I am now here. She was in a most wretched condition and she didn't know what to do, and it was the welfare people's fault that she was so poor and had so little in life. However there seems nothing to distinguish her brand of poverty from that of many others—it really seems like a quite ordinary case; that is, she and the children have a bit of what food there is to eat, a little coffee, too, a little syrup and a little thyme. More than that, she is occasionally able to beg her way into the movies without paying for a ticket. The true difficulty seems to lie in the matter of clothes; no shoes, no underwear, and her bed clothes are in a most sorry condition. She lifted up her skirt to show me that she had nothing to wear underneath and merely a thin calico dress outside. She even asked me to go home with her to have a personal look at the bed clothes, though it was really a pity to ask it of me, she said. Yes, no, I knew nothing of such matters. But oh yes, I did, and in any event I would have to go with her to the welfare agency, she said! Yes, and so I did. And in truth, the woman's teeth did chatter when she got outside, for it is a cold day to be wearing no more than a calico dress. But our visit proved in vain. Clothes? Bedding? Out of the question! And, on the whole, the widow's poverty was so far

from being hair-raising that the welfare woman merely shook her head and had nothing to offer."

Holm paused and looked at Fru Hagen.

"Well?"

"Yes, but there is one thing more you must hear," said Holm. "This morning the widow Solmund called on me in the drugstore with her bed clothes under her arm!"

"No, now really——"

"She wished to show them to me."

"Well, but just where do you figure in the situation?" asked Fru Hagen.

"Nowhere, unless it's possible she got my drugstore confused with the Department of Health or something like that."

"The whole thing seems incredible."

"Doesn't it though! She had told me she was going to bring me all she had to put under and over herself and her children, just to show me. Well, the whole business made a bundle she could carry under her arm."

"It is a matter one might either laugh or cry over," said Fru Hagen.

"Well, I did neither," said Holm. "But I admit that I am bewildered. The first thing I did was to drink a whiskey and soda with Vendt of the hotel, but as that did not help me a bit, I employed a remedy of which I had heard—I made it two whiskeys and soda. And then I came here."

"So, and what do you want here?" asked the lady.

Holm: "Is that any question to ask of a man standing on the scaffold! 'What do you want here?' you ask him!"

"Haha! Can't you turn the widow over to your apprentice and yourself decline the bed clothes?"

"I might have done that. But you see I have my apprentice at work on a game of patience which won't come out for me. It may take him the entire day."

"You must all of you be drunk there in your drugstore," said Fru Hagen.

"Not the pharmacist. And, as a matter of fact, no one. But when a stubborn game of patience refuses to come out, it is necessary to lay the cards out time after time. It is a perfectly shocking punishment to work out such a game—two, three, four o'clock in the morning and there you sit. On the whole, I believe, the present year is a terrible year for patience."

"Patience!" said Fru Hagen, contemptuously.

"Yes, but now my cat has gone and left me, too."

"Cat? Oh, fudge!"

"No, really you mustn't say that, Fru Hagen. That cat has lived with me for many years now. I hardly think, either, that it could be said that she has had such a bad home with me."

"Simpleton! But speaking of that widow of yours, so she brought you her bed clothes this morning, eh?"

"No, that she did not, fortunately," replied Holm. "No, that business about the bed clothes was only something I thought up to make myself interesting. So you're not to believe a word of it. But the widow Solmund does cling to me and she has, of course, visited me in the drugstore. It seems as though I shall never be rid of her because of the wretched condition of her own and the children's clothes. That much is the truth."

"So that's why you came to me?" asked Fru Hagen. "I haven't much more in the way of clothes than these you see on my back."

Holm: "Nor I, either. No, but I have an idea—as you might say, a notion from on high. The widow Solmund and her children are unquestionably too poorly clad in mere calico now that it is autumn with winter bearing down. What would you say to our getting up some manner of evening entertainment, the proceeds to go to her?"

"Possibly," said Fru Hagen.

Holm continued to expound his idea: the postmaster's wife would play, he himself could strum the guitar, Gina i Roten could sing and Karel yodel a few numbers to the

accompaniment of some master of the accordion. But the performance itself did not constitute the chief problem, he thought. The main thing was the audience, and this he was sure he would be able to assemble. The place must be the largest and finest in town—the cinema theatre . . .”

They discussed the plan together. Holm would take care of all the details. As for the audience? First of all the Consul and the people of his household and business—then the entire families of the doctor, the pastor, the sheriff, the district judge, the postmaster, Lawyer Buttonhead, the telegraph superintendent, the school teachers—how many did that make? Then there were the merchants in town, the workers on the road, Skipper Olsen and family, the entire hotel—servants and possible guests—yes, and then all the people of the parish round about! The *Segelfoss News* would print a glowing publicity article in both this and next week’s issues—placards printed in red and gold to tack up about the town and place in store windows—tickets one *krone*, net profit—how many did that make?

“Fifty persons,” Fru Hagen reckoned.

Holm: “No, hundreds! A thousand!” He begins to count them up himself: “Buttonhead and his wife make two——”

Fru Hagen, imploringly: “No, please——”

Pause.

They changed the subject, shifted over to personal matters, and frequently it was difficult to detect whether they were jesting or speaking seriously. They were jointly guilty of creating this conversational web of subtle nonsense, flirtatiousness and verbal hide-and-seek. Singular that they could play thus dangerously with fire without once causing a conflagration. No, possibly it was not even necessary for them to take proper precautions, possibly the whole affair was in the nature of a training course—no danger of fire, for there was nothing there to burn. Possibly . . .

Holm: "You said something about the Consul's new road?"

"Will you have a glass of port?" she asked.

"No, thanks! But you are anxious then that I shall utter a few confessions, I take it."

"Yes, I have heard that you have taken to neglecting your business during the day of late."

"Not really? I don't see that I have been neglecting my business. But since everything is over between you and me——"

"Is everything over?" asked Fru Hagen.

"Yes, and I am sorry for you!"

"Well, how did it go with Marna, then?" she asked.

"Marna?" said Holm pausing to think for a moment.

"Oh, her! No, I never stood a chance with her."

"Then possibly you declined to put yourself out for her?"

"Oh, indeed! I even put a part in my hair."

"Just to think you did that!"

"Tragic!" said Holm. "And now that very same lady has made a trip to Bodø for the purpose of nursing an injured workman lying there in the hospital."

"Christian love, no doubt?"

"No, the opposite, I have heard."

"What is the opposite of Christian love?"

"Fleshly, isn't it? The type of fleshly love I felt for you up until the time everything was over between us."

Fru Hagen: "But if it is, as you say, over, it might be possible to repair the damage, don't you think? You have reached a conclusion without consulting me, Herr Drug-gist!"

"The devil, that's too bad!" said Holm. "Ought I to have made more definite advances, do you suppose?"

"I hardly know," replied Fru Hagen.

"But you once announced to me that you would rather have your husband than me."

"Heavens, yes, and so I should."

"There, you see! And furthermore, what could we find to live on?"

"Why, what about your drugstore?"

"No," said Holm, shaking his head.

"What are you living on, yourself?"

Holm withdrew a check from his vest pocket, held it aloft in his hand and replied: "What do I live on now? On a fair number of negotiable instruments such as this one! Family contributions."

"Which will cease when you marry?"

"Now, now, my dear! Of course they will not cease, they might even increase. Though I admit it is a mite contemptible of me to accept them. Don't you think so yourself?"

"Yes, but what will you live on then—I mean in the event of your marriage to——?"

"Ah, but with her it is quite a different matter. We have spoken of that. She is a wizard at management. She was born with the ability and she has had plenty of experience in that line. A superb creature, let me tell you!"

"Are you in love?"

"More, I love her. And besides, it is only right that I, too, should marry some day, isn't it?"

"Can you win her?"

"Of course."

After a pause, Fru Hagen remarks tactfully: "But, in any event, have you thought over the entire situation? I may tell you straight out that I believe you are going astray."

"What do you mean by 'the entire situation,' Fru Hagen?"

"If you will not be angry with me, I'll tell you—I mean, her own situation. You know what I mean, all right."

Holm brushes the thought aside with the flat of his hand. "I am no bourgeois, if that's what you're driving at."

"I am not driving at anything!" replies Fru Hagen. "I wouldn't have you if I could get you. But your present predicament is surely a puzzle to me. After all, how did you ever fall in with her?"

"Fate," said Holm.

"But isn't she somewhat—I mean——"

"No," answered Holm. "We are of the same age."

"How young does she claim she is?"

"Seventy. But the mere question of years is nothing to her—she is unlike those women who always desire to appear as young as possible."

"Thanks."

"It is her absolute naturalness and humanness, within as well as without—health, capacity for joy and tenderness—which she makes no effort to conceal. I have never encountered her equal. Have you seen her?"

"Occasionally."

"Well, *I* have seen her," said Holm. "Nose, just a mite turned up—greenish eyes which dance and close to narrow slits when she laughs—large mouth, but perfectly bowed—charming!—lips red and full—a mouthful."

"I told you that I have seen her occasionally!"

"High breast, full lips——"

"What, again!"

"An avid mouth—her hair, such glory squandered upon a mere human being—but her mouth——"

"All right, all right!" says Fru Hagen. And then in tones of forced animation: "Listen, I have something to tell you. Karel i Roten has become downright clever on that guitar of yours."

Holm is caught with this remark, at least. "So? Karel i Roten? Well well! The entire house of Roten is musical. You offered me a glass of port, Fru Hagen?"

"Yes, but you really must forgive me, I was not in earnest. No, we can't afford to keep wine in the house. Did you think we could?"

"No, possibly not. Your pardon! But then it was a good thing I left my guitar with him, wasn't it? With Karel, I mean. But how do you know he can play it now?"

"My husband and I have been out to Roten."

"Without me!" says Holm.

"Yes, but it wasn't to be mean. My husband went on an errand. You see, he has been helping Karel to get public funds for the purpose of draining a certain pond on his property."

"Your husband?"

"Yes. And Karel was so happy over it, he laid off work and played for us."

"That husband of yours must be a devil of a fellow to be able to get hold of public funds merely on his say-so."

"Well, he certainly went no higher up than the local committee on agriculture. And it is true that my husband is both capable and intelligent. Have you ever doubted the fact?"

Holm, smiling: "Were things as they used to be between us, I should have replied that I too am capable and intelligent."

Fru Hagen, likewise with a smile: "And were things as they used to be between us, I should, for fear of losing you, have answered yes."

"But now?"

"No, now I am unfortunately obliged to say that you are merely a man who is clever at turning out words."

"The devil you say!" exclaimed Holm. "Turning out words?"

"Yes, with a poor shallow mind like my own. We are both so empty. Two empty vessels."

Holm: "After this I have nothing left to do——"

Fru Hagen interrupts him: "Heavens, let me off this time! If it's just more talk on your part."

"Shall I hold my tongue then? Tell me!"

"You might hang your head and tell me that you are

at last able to comprehend fully why I should rather have my husband than you."

Holm regarded her scrutinizingly: "I trust there's no shade of jealousy in that remark?"

"I don't know," said Fru Hagen.

Holm rose to leave. "Let us be just a wee bit charitable toward ourselves, Fru Hagen. No one can be anything other than that which he is. Druggist Holm is nothing, but whatever he is, he is quite unlike Postmaster Hagen. And for this he is willing to forgive himself. We have spoken of you and another lady—turned out words, as you put it. You and she are nothing alike, but you are both something——"

Fru Hagen sprang up. "I do not wish to be compared with her!"

Holm paled, his eyes grew hard and he replied: "I said we must be charitable toward ourselves, Fru Hagen. We must forgive ourselves for not being as great as others."

Druggist Holm walked down to the bank with his check. Inside stood the Consul in conference with Lawyer-Banker Pettersen. They were talking earnestly, and now and then the sum sixty thousand was mentioned. At first the Consul seemed to take the entire matter for a joke, though he declined to laugh at its dubious humour. On the contrary, by wrinkling his brow, he showed Herr Buttonhead his place. One was simply not to indulge in levity during a conversation with the Consul—a fetish one was bound to respect.

Sixty thousand.

There was some mistake about that, some frightful mistake, and the Consul said: "I beg your pardon, but neither you nor I can afford the time to indulge in such tomfoolery!"

"This is not tomfoolery," said Pettersen.

Consul Gordon Tidemand had learned that an English gentleman must not proceed too rapidly, that he must

give his opponent a chance. Hence he remained silent for a brief time, though he tightly compressed his lips and stared with eyes of ice.

"But what does that amount to for one such as you, Herr Consul!" said Pettersen. "You must have considerably more than that outstanding and I should be pleased indeed if you would allow me to do something to collect it for you——"

"Pardon me," interrupted the Consul, "but aren't you getting slightly beside the point?"

"And to say nothing of all your other resources," continued Pettersen. "I wish I were as well off as you!" Patronizingly, he stretched forth his hand to receive the druggist's check for the purpose of passing it for payment.

But this was more than the Consul was willing to endure; his eyes were needles and he said: "Pardon, you will first finish with me!"

"Very well," replied Pettersen, now the lawyer. "But is there more to be said?" he asked.

"A little. A mere detail—I should like my account balanced to date."

"Yes," said Pettersen. "Yes. But you can see it right here in the books."

"Very kind of you, I'm sure. But I desire a regular bank statement. When may I have it?"

"I'll ask the cashier to hurry with it."

"Thank you. For all the years since my father's death."

"What!" asked the lawyer with a shock.

"From the date I took over the business."

"That means a terrific amount of work. And I don't even know that the present bank staff need be expected——"

"Do you prefer that the account shall be audited by order of the court?"

"By order of the court?" The lawyer smiled. "That involves rather complicated proceedings."

"Hardly pleasant for me to mention."

"But you've received your bank statement year by year, haven't you! And now at this late date you detect a mistake! The best thing would be to call in the directors."

"I have no objection to that."

The lawyer smiled again. "And even if you did object to it, Herr Consul!"

Gordon Tidemand asked: "Is that the tone you choose to adopt?"

"Yes, that's the tone I now choose to adopt! You are so high and mighty! Here you come to an old attorney and mention possible court proceedings."

"Your pardon, if I find myself compelled to mention them further!"

"Go ahead and talk!" said the lawyer in an ugly voice. "You have had your statements year by year. The accounts have been audited year by year."

The Consul nodded. "Yes. I understand that, before you became head of the bank here, you had something to do with auditing the accounts. But did you have expert assistance in those years?"

"I'm something of an expert myself, I believe."

"I sincerely trust so. But here you suddenly come out with a hitherto unnoticed claim against my father, an enormous claim which your audits have up until now failed to reveal."

"Yes, it may be that I went over the account with too little understanding at first, for which no court in the land could possibly criticise me. I was not alone in conducting the audit and I may have relied somewhat blindly upon my assistant."

Gordon Tidemand shrugged his shoulders. "Nevertheless you now point conclusively to that audit? Are you aware of the fact, Herr Lawyer, that you are in a tight corner?"

"I? Well now, I never——"

"I fear so," said the Consul.

Brief silence. The lawyer was thinking, blinking his eyes behind his glasses and thinking. Apparently he was subsiding for he said: "Why make so much of the situation? If we are in any way in error, obviously we shall correct the mistake."

The Consul, curtly: "Of course, you will correct it! I thought I saw the druggist here?"

"He left at once. I see him walking up and down, outside."

The Consul went to the door, motioned to the druggist to come in and tendered his profuse apologies.

The druggist: "Oh my, no! What is there to be said! I merely called here on an insignificant matter of business. It hardly involves the elaborate sums of which I heard you gentlemen speaking!" He handed over his check for the executive's okay.

"Right then, Herr Bank-President—you will send me a full statement of my account as soon as possible? Thank you." The Consul made ready to depart.

"As soon as possible, we may say. But if it proves necessary to call in the directors, it may take time. However, you may have your statement for the current year tomorrow, if you like."

"My account involves only a few items each year, and it ought not to take you long to prepare a statement of that. But my real interest lies in discovering the year in which you began carrying forward this fictitious sum of sixty thousand plus interest."

"Well, that I can tell you right here and now," replied the banker. "The sixty thousand were inserted into the account on the first of this year—naturally plus interest from the time the debt was incurred."

"Thank you, then all I need—for the present!—is a statement covering the current year. And that I shall receive tomorrow?"

"Yes."

Consul Gordon Tidemand wished both gentleman good-day and departed.

It occurred to Lawyer Pettersen too late that the druggist had been called in to serve as a witness.

"Ho, it looks now like you're in for a blow!" said Holm.

"It's he who is in for a blow," replied the lawyer.

"I've always heard that if there's one thing that man knows it's accounting."

"So do I."

"Well, you'll have need for all you know about it," said Holm. He stepped over to the teller and received cash for his check. Returning to Pettersen, he said: "By the way, I understand you are at the head of the company that owns the cinema. Will you loan us the theatre for an amateur performance?"

"Certainly, any evening with the exception of Saturdays."

"Good. We are planning a little entertainment to raise funds for a certain poor family."

"Thirty *kroner*," said the lawyer. "What evening shall we say?" he asked, reaching for a calendar.

Holm: "Surely you misunderstand. This is a charitable undertaking—we shall be unable to pay anything."

"Charity or no charity, it's all the same. We have just been to great expense laying a cement floor in the theatre, and we must make this up wherever possible. Thirty *kroner* is reasonable at that. What evening would you like?"

"Sunday evening," answered Holm. His face was white as he paid over the thirty *kroner*. "And now my receipt!" he demanded.

"Receipt? I've never given receipts for it before."

"Just in case you were to be shot before the date arrives. I don't want to be held up twice for the same obligation."

Holm got his receipt and left the bank.

He next called at the office of the *Segelfoss News* and

had a talk with Editor Davidsen regarding the placards—red and gold placards to tack up on telephone poles and place in store windows—fifteen or twenty of them. The copy was to run somewhat as follows: "Amateur Performance"—then the time and place—"Ticket and programme at the door."

They discussed the individual entertainers, the artists who were to appear, and decided on an appropriate article to come out in the next issue of the *News*. All the details were arranged—the druggist's apprentice would call for the placards as soon as they were dry and see that they were properly displayed about the town. He would also see about getting an accordion player. In order to save the cost of printing tickets, the regular roll of cinema tickets would be used on this occasion. The programme, Holm would make up later in the week in consultation with Vendt of the hotel.

"How much do I owe you?" asked Holm.

"No—I thought you said it was for charity," said Davidsen.

Holm took out a fat roll of bills to prove how flush he was and again asked: "How much do I owe you?"

"Well, if I must take something," said Davidsen, reluctantly, "let's make it a couple of *kroner*."

"Won't cover even the cost of the paper," said Holm and handed over a ten-spot.

Davidsen fumbled through all his pockets. "I don't believe I can—I'm a bit short of small change——"

Holm hastened with long strides out to Roten, to Gina and Karel i Roten.

CHAPTER TWENTY

THERE was no mistaking it, if there was one thing Gordon Tidemand knew it was how to figure accounts.

He received his bank statement on the following day and found good cause to triumph: the credit balance had now shrunk to more than half the figure previously mentioned—to four-and-twenty thousand—including his own cash borrowings from the bank! His father's enormous debt to the bank had thus diminished to a mere twelve thousand, plus two thousand in interest!

There followed an attempted explanation: "The senseless error was due to several years' faulty posting in the late Herr Theodore Jensen's two accounts. Yours truly, the Segelfoss Savings Bank, J. C. Pettersen."

"Hm!" said Gordon Tidemand ominously. "He'll take back this twelve thousand, too, along with this interest of his! Is he trying to fool with me? I'll show that—that——" He might have used the name "Buttonhead," but an English gentleman does not call a man names, even in the privacy of his own office. "I'll give due consideration to the possibility of calling in the authorities," he said. Ah, that sounded better at once!

He sent the errand boy with a note to the former president of the bank: "Dear Sir, The next time you are in this part of town, you would be conferring a favour upon me if you would stop in to answer me a question. Yours truly, Consul Gordon Tidemand."

The man appeared immediately. He was a man of the parish, one Johnsen by name, a pensioned school teacher, familiar with all that went on in the district, old now, but

still one of the bank's directors. The Consul apologized for having put him to this inconvenience and explained what he had come up against at the bank.

Johnsen shook his head and let fall a word to the effect that more than one had come up against Lawyer Pettersen. At the last directors' meeting he had come out with the definite suggestion to put Karel i Roten's farm up for public auction.

"Karel i Roten is deep in my books, too, but what of it!" said the Consul.

"No, he stops at nothing, that lawyer. He's too greedy."

"Well, he'd better not come too close to me!" said the Consul. "Now what I really desired of you, Johnsen, is this: have you any recollection which would lead you to suppose that my father was in any way in debt to the Segelfoss Savings Bank when he died?"

"No, certainly he was not!" said Johnsen and laughed a bit at such an idea. "No, he was no man to owe anyone anything. He was too much of a man for that. And he always had a helping hand for those in need."

"Then how can Lawyer Pettersen pin on him a debt of sixty thousand? Later reducing the amount to twelve thousand? How can he, for that matter, pin on him a debt of a single *øre*?"

Johnsen again shook that grey head of his and said: "That's one thing I can't understand. Unless he could have discovered some mistake in the books as I kept them in my time. And I can say nothing about that without having the books before me. But, in any event, your father certainly didn't owe the bank a single penny when he died. All in all, he never did owe the bank anything. It was just the other way round—he usually kept a large sum on deposit with us. I'll take my oath on that."

"Thanks! That's just what I wanted to hear!" The Consul picked up a small book from his desk. "This is my father's old passbook," he said. "I find here a couple of

entries I wonder if I might ask you about. These figures are entered clearly enough in the handwriting of my father and not in that of the bank teller."

Johnsen laughed apologetically. "Oh yes, I suppose that is a bit of an irregularity," he said. "But we never used to take such things too seriously. That was when he came to the bank with a deposit and forgot to bring his passbook with him. He entered the deposits himself when he got back to the store. We all knew each other so well—we were all honest and none of us ever tried to cheat another. But of course, things like that wouldn't go in these days. Hehe! What are the entries in question?"

"Here is one for seven thousand five hundred *kroner* 'acknowledged by separate receipt' and a little further down another for four thousand five hundred also 'acknowledged by separate receipt.' "

"Yes, yes!" said Johnsen. "I can explain those easily enough."

"You can?"

"Yes, yes, those are perfectly correct. That was when he handed me the money personally and I later deposited it to his account and noted down in pencil, as was my custom, 'acknowledged by separate receipt.' "

"These transactions didn't take place in the bank, then?"

"No, up at the Manor, up at Segelfoss Manor, at council meetings."

"Ah!" exclaimed the Consul, relieved. "That explains how he himself would keep his passbook *à jour* when he returned to the office."

Johnsen: "Yes, everything was honest and above-board. I remember very well both times—it was when his seiners had met with great success and he was rolling in wealth. We two were sitting in council meeting—yes, and he was the chairman and I was only an ordinary member—but after I took over the management of the bank and was

a school teacher and suchlike, he seemed to take to me just a mite and he seemed to have great confidence in me. 'Here, take this money,' he would say. 'Put it in the bank for me before I lose it!' When I offered him a receipt for the money he said that such was unnecessary, but on these two occasions I insisted upon giving him a receipt, as the amounts involved were so large. On other occasions, when the amounts were small, I gave him no receipt. People used to hand me money at church or at other gatherings, interest money or partial payments on small loans from the bank, and in such cases I would make a note in pencil in the books: 'oral receipt.' Yes, that's the way we used to do business in those days and I never heard a complaint from anyone about it. As a matter of fact, the rural folk used to thank me for it."

The Consul: "But I can not understand why my father didn't go himself to the bank with his money. For him who lived right here, it was only a few steps."

"Yes," replied Johnsen somewhat shyly. "Yes, you must forgive me for mentioning it, but you see there was one little peculiarity with your father, he was just a wee bit vain at times. He liked to show the whole council how much money he was worth. He couldn't do that if he were to go to the bank by himself. Pardon, but it wasn't I alone who had that impression of him."

"That's an excellent explanation," said Gordon Tide-
mand, "and I thank you heartily for the light you have thrown on the subject. I do not know what use I shall have for it, but should the occasion arise, it is possible that I shall require you as a witness."

"At any time, my dear Consul!" replied Johnsen. "At your service at any time at all!"

The Consul sent his errand boy with the following message to the lawyer: "Both yesterday and today I have been expecting the Herr Bank-President to call on me in

my office. My future action in this matter will depend entirely upon what explanations and apologies you may choose to offer. Yours truly."

The first hour passed with no word from Pettersen. Then the telephone rang and it was the lawyer on the other end of the line. Had not the bank statement been received? Was not the explanation that the error was due to faulty entries made by his predecessors in the bank sufficient? If not, what further was there to explain? He would be in the bank at two o'clock. At the Herr Consul's service!

Hear that! He would be of service—at the bank! The Consul uttered not a single word in reply. Instead, he hung up the receiver in Pettersen's ear.

Unreasonable to suppose that that good Pettersen would refrain from coming himself. Fine! The Consul would prepare for him. Would he offer the man a chair? No, for the Consul would himself descend from his swivel stool and conduct the interview on his feet. But what if the man were to take a chair and sit down without being asked? That would be like him—it would be like him to offer his apologies whilst slouching in a chair!

There were three unpainted chairs in the office, three chairs dating back to the regime of his father, Theodore paa Bua. Well, he could have these chairs removed, thus compelling his visitor to stand? But no, the office was empty and barren enough as it was—merely the desk, the stove, the safe and the copy press—and Gordon Tide-mand was hardly of a mind to make his office, his British Consulate, appear more barren than it already was. After a time a most brilliant idea occurred to him—a solution to the entire problem: he would order one of his store hands to paint the chairs, thus rendering them unfit for use. And the paint would likewise help to brighten up the office. All in all, a flash of genius!

He rang and gave his orders. The colour? Green, dark

green, to match everything else in the room. There would be plenty of time. Four hours until two o'clock.

The Consul worked as usual at his desk; the stench of paint grew stronger in the room, but the chairs had begun to gleam like new—they were actually no longer to be recognized. His mother would certainly be surprised the next time she visited his office.

At two o'clock he drove home to lunch.

When he returned at four, the lawyer was pacing back and forth outside. Together they stepped into the office, the lawyer being courteously offered first use of the door. Inside, he sniffed the air.

"You've been painting?" he asked.

"The chairs," said the Consul, curtly.

The battle began without further delay.

"So you're not yet of a mind to offer your apologies?" asked the Consul.

"If you insist upon being a child," grated the lawyer, "I suppose I can respectfully beg your pardon for those old errors in posting."

"But not for your own conduct in the matter?"

"Hm, but that was entirely guided by what had gone on before."

"Your audit, for example, I suppose."

The lawyer shrugged his shoulders. "I acted in good faith," he said.

"And I don't suppose, either, that it is your desire to apologize for your most recent errors as they appear on the statement?"

"What errors?"

"The twelve thousand plus interest which you set forth as a claim against my father."

"No, that stands. I can't see how it's up to me to apologize for the fact that your father owed money."

"The former head of the bank stands ready to swear in court that my father never owed this money."

"Johnsen? That blundering fool?" asked the lawyer. "I have more faith in myself than I have in him."

"The point is rather whether others might have more faith in him than in you."

"What others? You, I suppose?"

"Yes. And eventually, the court."

"There we have the court again!" said the lawyer. "I won't hear any more of such nonsense!"

"The oath of a man such as Johnsen is not to be whistled aside by a man of your calibre."

"Do you know," asked the lawyer, "why this same Johnsen was removed from office?"

"Because you desired to get rid of him, wasn't it?"

"That's untrue. It was because we all found him to be unqualified."

"But you—is it possible that you do not find yourself unqualified?"

"Yes, in one respect or another," replied the lawyer. "For example I am unqualified to accede to a childish desire for an apology for a mistake which was promptly rectified. But I am not unqualified when it comes to finding both legal and moral fault with your father's method of bookkeeping. In his passbook you will see that he has himself entered two deposits for which he has no receipt from the bank."

"One item of seven and a half thousand and another for four and a half thousand?"

"Yes."

"Covering these two entries are both Johnsen's oath and separate receipts."

"Receipts? Let me see them!" says the lawyer and stretches forth his hand.

The Consul: "Even if I were to stand here with the receipts in my hand, I doubt that I should place them in yours."

"The time will come when you'll have to, now let me

tell you that! Who ever heard of such bookkeeping! A private individual, a common ordinary business man undertaking to keep his own bankbook! What was he, then, a megalomaniac?"

"I doubt it."

"Well, I've heard one thing or another about him. I never knew him personally—nor did you either, it is possible. We hear so many things, you know. Possibly, he wasn't even your real——"

Now it ill-becomes an English gentleman to fly at the throat of a mere lawyer, but it is both fitting and proper for such a gentleman to turn pale with wrath and to hold open the door of his office until such a lawyer has left the room. An English gentleman, in other words, behaves with perfect manners, for that is what makes him a gentleman.

But in this instance?

A gentleman may strike with his fist, or shoot, slay and trample under foot, and still remain a gentleman.

But in this instance?

The Consul did not raise so much as a finger. He was not, it seems, a perfect type—he was a mixture of races, a hybrid, and a first-generation blend at that—which means that his nature consisted of two separate and distinct halves. Nevertheless, in this instance, the Consul did something which saved not only himself, but his parents and the entire situation: he stood with no sign of emotion on his face whatever, and simply stared his adversary straight in the eyes. With a studious expression on his face he attempted to discover what the man had meant. What he had said was a banality—it may be said of anyone, that, in truth, he can not be positive as to the identity of his father. Was it the usual abracadabra the lawyer had thus chosen to utter? But why so? At length the Consul declined to give the stupid matter any further

thought; he withdrew his eyes and began indifferently to fuss with a few papers on his desk.

Lawyer Pettersen was greatly bewildered. A novel type of self-discipline had revealed itself here before his eyes, an utterly foreign brand of personal superiority, totally unrelated to such phenomena as boxing, dueling or verbal debate. What was he to do in the face of it? He began to speak, to flounder about in order to prove to himself his own existence! A devil of a situation to arise out of another's mistakes! He had simply delved back into the books, as it was his duty to do, for he was the bank's faithful servant and was employed to care for its interests. But what did he get for that?

He began pacing back and forth across the floor, behaviour which in itself was most discourteous, inasmuch as he was being received in another's office; he halted and stared at a map on the wall, went over to the chairs, touched them one after another as though hoping to discover at least one of them dry enough to use as a seat. He wiped his fingers on his socks. "I'm sorry I didn't bring one of my own chairs along with me," he said bitterly. But the Consul appeared to be busily at work and did not so much as glance up.

The lawyer inquired with a trace of worry in his voice: "You don't think for a moment that I have been looking after my own interests in this matter, do you?"

The Consul, after a delay filled with much glancing at papers: "I've never considered that angle of the present situation."

"That I should have had some personal interest in the matter?"

No answer.

Both men are silent.

At length, the lawyer: "Well, I don't give a damn what you think! Go ahead and bring on a court action if you're

that childish. But you'll get nowhere with it, I can tell you. The bank has given no receipt for the moneys your father owes it, and no court of law would constitute old man Johnsen's oath as a receipt. I trust you have understood my words."

He must have been out of his mind; he had certainly lost his poise. At the same time his determination and fixity of purpose had shown that he was not playing a game; no, in his own way he was acting in good faith. His avarice was as well-known as his face. In his petty grasping way, he was unwilling to relinquish the slightest remuneration in sight—a postage stamp in payment for a transcript consisting of no more than a few lines! Had he now produced these alleged debts for collection in the exclusive interest of the bank? Or was he seriously considering a campaign to collect the Consul's many outstanding claims? He could not avoid being misunderstood. There were those receipts mentioned during his conversation with the Consul; was he hoping that in the course of so many years they had become lost? But in that event, what could he possibly attain? Nothing.

J. C. Pettersen—the man himself mattered little, but his hard-headedness, his insanely enterprising spirit had brought about so many ravages that the present situation was fraught with significance both for himself and for others, particularly for Editor Davidsen whose day, as it were, was at hand.

Gordon Tidemand had a talk with his mother—he had never outgrown his need for her. She did not mince matters, and advised him at once against bringing suit against the lawyer, giving as her reason that "Pettersen was not worth the bother."

"Better that you should go and have a talk with the judge," she said.

But no, her son stood firmly opposed to this suggestion; the thought of seeking underhanded assistance did not

appeal to him, especially from a man who had been a guest in his home.

But the judge was chairman of the board of directors, she said.

So much the worse, replied her son. An odd monkey, that Gordon!

He was greatly annoyed with himself for having neglected to have that old discarded passbook put in proper order at the bank while there had yet been time. Suppose that old man Johnsen had been dead, he said.

"But he isn't!" laughed his mother.

"But suppose he were! Then I should not have had his testimony in this matter! Johnsen's personal receipts are gone. I should have a bank of my own, shouldn't I? I wouldn't mention such a thing had I not studied banking in school and acquired such a thorough knowledge of the subject—— But I have searched high and low through the office, dumped out all the drawers and dug into all the old manila envelopes where father used to hide his papers. But those two miserable receipts are nowhere to be found."

His mother: "You don't suppose they could be up here at the Manor?"

"How should I know! However, it was up here the transactions took place—at meetings of the town council."

"I'll make a search," she said.

Gordon Tidemand was unhappy. The entire stupid affair with the lawyer had arisen just in time to interfere with his own plans. He ought to have money in the bank soon now, a few thousand to tide him over the slack season, but, under the circumstances, he would refuse to go to Pettersen for a loan. As though he could bring himself to that!

He was in a wretched humour when he drove back to the office after lunch and during the afternoon his work suffered because of it. But at least there was one bright

spot in his day in the form of a communication which he found on his desk: a large order from his traveler through Helgeland. There was no end to the amount of expensive ladies' garments that that fellow could sell on his trips! Yes, he had even sold to Knoff himself, the trader who had married Gordon Tidemand's sister Lillian. . . .

Gammelmoderen appeared at the office. She had been walking rapidly and was warm and charmingly flushed.

"My, what pretty chairs!" she cried.

"Whoa—don't sit down!" he screamed.

No, she did not take a seat; she came over to him, laid some papers on the desk, smiled and waited for his first word.

"What's all this?" he asked.

"Old scraps of paper, memoradums and such stuff as your father used to carry about in his pocket!"

"But you didn't find the——" Suddenly he gave a start. . . .

There were the two receipts signed by Johnsen as president of the bank!

"Ho!"

Yes, during all the years of her marriage, Gammelmoderen had been obliged to sew a special inner pocket on every new vest her husband had acquired. And this afternoon she had hit upon the idea of searching the pockets of a couple of old vests of Theodore's which had hung there ever since his death. Thus she had come across these scraps of paper. And she had not wished to wait for her son to return home that evening. . . .

"You surely are a prize, mother!" said Gordon Tidemand. His gratitude knew no bounds. Not because the two old receipts would make any difference one way or another, but because they had brought order out of chaos and had soothed his sense of honour.

"Go out into the store and pick out any dress we have in stock, mother!" he said.

"What? Do you mean it?"

"It's your finder's reward!"

His mother blushed girlishly and thanked him. She was in such sore need of a new dress. Somehow, it was her desire to appear well-dressed just at this time.

As was to be expected, things now began to take a bad turn for Lawyer Pettersen. He should not have been so zealous about finding fault with the Consul's bank account.

He was summoned before a special meeting of the board of directors, was questioned minutely by the members individually and collectively, was confronted with the bank statement, the passbook and the penciled receipts, and himself had nothing to say. He apologized by saying that it had been nought save his desire to safeguard the interests of the bank which had caused him to act.

When ordered to resign his position, he was true to his colours and demanded three months' salary. Another, under the circumstances, would have uttered no word about salary—Gordon Tidemand, for example, would have gone pale and thrust aside the question of salary as an insult, had the matter of compensation been mentioned to him. But Lawyer Pettersen was true to his own colours and insisted upon his right to this salary.

The magistrate, with full dignity, reproved him: "I believe, Lawyer Pettersen, that you have every reason to leave without further ado!" he said.

"Without further ado?" said the lawyer. "Never!"

The man became something of a riddle at this point. He had revealed no such ugly side of his nature prior to this, and the gentlemen were amazed. Formerly, in spite of his implacable avarice, he had been, after a fashion,

extremely affable; he had frequently found himself engaged in a duel of words with the druggist and had often been able to return thrust for thrust. He had even found it possible to joke a bit about his own miserliness, stating that this was his own special cross to bear. And a miser he was indeed! Once on a steamer he discovered that he had lost his change purse. The purse had been found, but Lawyer Pettersen insisted that *his* purse had contained much more change than that—yes, double the amount!—and gave this as his excuse for refusing to offer a reward to the finder. Well, but what had his avarice gained for him? Nothing. He now stood forth, a loser. Everything had gone wrong for him, though he actually had gained one thing—a bad name.

He was a dangerous man, though he was his own worst enemy. In his affair with Gordon Tidemand, he saw no reason why he should be a subject for censure. "What wrong have I committed?" he asked. He even wished to know the name of the man who was to succeed him. "Johnsen, at least, won't do," he said. And in that, no doubt, he was right. Johnsen was too quick with a pencil when it came to keeping the books. Separate receipt! Oral receipt! Yes, but he had been honest and honourable, a servant of the people, and in his time the best that could have been found.

So, in any event, they invited old Johnsen to return to his former position. The offer touched him; he thanked the kind gentlemen, but declined. The bank, it seemed, could not afford to maintain a full-time manager, the salary was commensurate with the work involved and this was little enough. Besides, that capable cashier in the bank was a great help. For a moment the gentlemen considered promoting the cashier to the office of manager, but they were obliged to give him up as a possibility, as he was indispensable where he was.

Was there a dearth of potential bank managers? Some-

one mentioned Skipper Olsen, but he lived too far out in the country and it was doubtful the man could write. Of course, it would be impossible to secure the services of Consul Gordon Tidemand himself. No, they did not even ask him, they knew what constituted good manners too well for that. The postmaster and the telegraph superintendent likewise came in for a bit of discussion, but the office hours of these gentlemen conflicted with those of the bank. So far as the school teachers were concerned, none could be found to compare with old Johnsen in his day.

They wracked their brains for some time.

Then someone brought up the name of Herr Davidsen, editor and publisher of the *Segelfoss News*. Davidsen? said the others, and turned this name over on their tongues. Ye-es, possibly! Of course, he could not hope to establish much confidence in himself—he had nothing to his name, only two cases of type—but the directors were hard put; there was a shortage of eligible bank material.

A committee interviewed Davidsen, but no, the latter shook his head.

The salary was such and such, they said.

Davidsen declined.

They asked him the reason for his refusal.

The reason was that he knew nothing at all about banking.

But neither had the past presidents or the directors who constituted the board, in the main. It was a simple matter to learn the more important details. Banking involved no special witchcraft and all important questions were decided by the directors.

The idea was by no means stupid, that of getting Davidsen in as manager of the bank. For a long time now he had been writing and publishing what he wrote, in a charming little local newspaper, and in meetings of the town council he had long been recognized as the possessor of a capable mind. Folk in general gave no great

thought either to the man himself or to his publication, but that was because he had never done anything to thrust himself forward; instead, he had gone on in that little cubbyhole of his, where, with the aid of a bright little daughter, he had got out his paper every Wednesday. And the paper went the rounds, he got along—though, to be sure, by the skin of his teeth. . . .

They asked him if, considering how things stood with himself, his wife and his five children, he could afford to turn down their offer.

“My dear friends,” he replied. “I know no more about banking than does my little daughter here. Of course, she may on occasion have been inside that bank of yours with a handbill or two, that may be perfectly true, but as for myself I have never been inside a bank in my life!”

The committee’s mind was now made up that Davidsen was the likeliest man for the position, and the gentlemen were determined not to let him get away. Even Lawyer Pettersen was satisfied with him and offered, for a reasonable consideration, to instruct him in banking technique, at which the committee smiled and respectfully declined his offer. Instead, they went at once to the Consul and had a talk with him. He understood, did he not, that the bank was now without a director of its affairs, and therefore would he not be willing to assist Editor Davidsen with his own vast fund of knowledge?

With pleasure! said the Consul. He would be glad, at any time, to spend a few days in the bank with Davidsen and show him one thing or another. “When do we begin? I’m ready to go with you at once!”

No, Gordon Tidemand was by no means unwilling to help out.

And so, in the end, there was no way out of it for Davidsen. But he insisted upon his sovereign right to withdraw without notice, at any time he might consider himself incapable of filling his office.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

A DIFFICULT time just now for Davidsen to begin his period of training in the bank. The druggist kept wandering into his shop and taking up his time with discussions of a certain evening entertainment he was promoting.

The *Segelfoss News* had appeared with a decidedly appealing notice about the coming performance, a whole little article which no one could overlook. The headline read: "Entertainment to Raise Money."

But the most important detail was yet to be taken care of: the programme. Originally this had been simple enough, but after repeated conferences with Vendt of the hotel, Holm kept running back to Davidsen with alterations in the manuscript. When at length the programme had been printed, it appeared so outlandish to Davidsen that he remarked: "If you can get this thing to go, I'll say you're a lucky dog, Herr Druggist!"

"It's Vendt who has all the ideas," said Holm, shifting the blame upon his friend.

Hotelkeeper Vendt was a man with a good bit of woman in his make-up. Somewhat round and flabby, a negligible growth of beard on his face, he was, furthermore, left-handed. When he spoke, it sounded as though his voice were just changing—sometimes it would be deep and manly, but more often it would break and slide up the scale to an effeminate squeal. He could wash and cook and sew; he was good-natured and easily moved to tears. Several generations back there had been an influx of Jewish blood in his family—the blood of Jews from Holland, of which there had been so many in Bergen. He was now forty-five and still a bachelor.

Vendt was a blithely ignorant man, for he had read nothing whatever in his life, though he was something of an artist in his own way, with a decided gift for story-telling. He was likewise afflicted with a strenuous desire to sing; however, as he was tone-deaf, his notes were distressingly false. Thus he was no prodigy, despite his native talent. His one claim to distinction lay in the tales he told. Suddenly he would burst forth with one, thought up on the spur of the moment and delivered quite impromptu. There was little in the tales themselves, it was all in his manner of telling them. Not that he indulged in histrionics—the cheap tricks of the actor were entirely unknown to him—he would deliver his remarks without moving so much as a finger. Nor were his fingers in any way mobile members; they were short and stubby and utterly expressionless. No, he would merely sit down with an innocent look on his face and start in telling a story.

No doubt it had been this talent of his which had first attracted Druggist Holm to the man. They were both from Bergen and their tastes were similar. At the moment they were busy with the programme for the coming entertainment.

The original thought had been to schedule the individual performers for two appearances each, with the exception of Gina i Roten who was to appear three times—she would close the programme with that famous cow-call of hers. Fru Hagen, the postmaster's wife, was to play two groups of numbers, the first a series of folk melodies, the second two Mozart sonatas. This was legitimate music and the two gentlemen dared not tamper with this portion of the programme. Nor could any change be made in Gina i Roten's scheduled appearances, as both her main groups were to consist of hymns. But the accordion player's and their own numbers were altered and shifted about no end.

Hotelkeeper Vendt was originally listed for a single

appearance as a monologist—later he desired to be billed as a “reader” and finally as a “lecturer.”

“Now let me hear what you intend to do yourself?” he asked of Holm.

Holm was to accompany Gina’s hymns on the guitar and later he would fill in a number by playing two records on the gramophone; thus one could see how busy he would be. However he must have felt that he had placed himself too much in the background, for he suddenly announced that he was contemplating a couple of solo numbers.

“Songs?” asked Vendt.

“Rather more in the way of recitations,” replied Holm.

“What’s that?”

“That is to say, I shall repeat a few verses whilst my pharmacist plays a tune on a comb.”

Vendt had managed hotels in many lands and it was now his desire that a foreign touch be added to the programme. Just as with menu cards, he said; they always fell flat in Norwegian.

“Well, what do you suggest?” asked Holm.

“Oh—there must be a great many dainty things to choose from,” said Vendt.

They discussed the matter seriously, now and then reached for a glass, and Holm, in particular, made a great point of throwing in technical musical terms, and made mention of certain operas and symphonies. He had given some thought to the idea of a string quintette with cembalo, he said.

“Who is going to play that thing?” asked Vendt.

“I shall,” said Holm.

“Do you know how to do that?”

“Yes and no—but I shall endeavour to do my best.”

“All right, then I’ll give a little foreign ballad I heard in my early youth and which I’ve never forgotten—‘*Je suis à vous, Madame*,’ it’s called.”

“Can you sing it in French?”

"Naturally," said Vendt. "Now put down an intermission."

"Intermission? What for?"

"It will help to fill up the programme—it will make another line. That's the way we often do to make a menu card look longer—you know, add some little thing, like table water."

They refilled their glasses and drank.

Holm: "I've been thinking of Bismarck's March."

No, this did not appeal to Vendt.

"Not the one over the Alps," said Holm. "Bismarck's March is a rather odd thing—it appears in the Iliad."

"In the what?"

"You know, that thing by Homer—the Iliad."

Vendt thought this over. "Well, if that's the case," he said. "But who's to play it?"

"It can be played on the *concertina* and Karel i Roten can yodel. What do you say, shall I set that down?"

"All right," said Vendt, yielding. "But I can't help it if I'm pro-French. Don't use the name 'Bismarck'—just put down the name 'Iliad.'"

Holm wrote down "The Iliad."

"And now I imagine that will be all?" he asked.

"Put down another intermission," said Vendt. . . .

Holm was obliged to make two or three trips to the print shop before he found Davidsen in. The latter was terrifically busy with his new job at the bank and could spare but little time to talk.

"Is this the programme in its final form?" he asked.

"For the present," answered Holm, cautiously. "We were just trying to decide whether or not we ought to include the Songs of the Sulamite."

"No, I don't believe we ought to think of any more changes," said Davidsen. "It does not seem to my mind that the programme is improving greatly."

Holm again laid the blame upon Vendt. He had so

many ideas. For the past twenty-four hours he had been talking nothing but French.

Davidson hastily scanned the manuscript. "There seems to be a frightful number of intermissions," he said. "Three intermissions."

Holm: "That too, was Vendt's idea. That's after the manner they make out menus, he tells me."

"Well, if only you can get away with it!" said Davidson. "How many shall I print?"

"Three hundred," said Holm, no niggard.

Before leaving the shop he paid for the printing. He paid so handsomely that Davidson threw in an extra job: he printed a whole stack of handbills which his daughter was to pass out on Sunday afternoon. A splendid idea on Davidson's part; people would pause on the street to read those scraps of paper.

The signs were promising indeed—the weather was fine and many people were abroad.

The druggist's apprentice had been out the entire morning on business; he had picked up three hundred of the tickets used by the motion picture theatre and had gone from house to house and sold them for one *krone* apiece. When he returned at noon, he had between seventy and eighty *kroner* in his pocket. He ate his luncheon and immediately went forth again. A clever chap, that apprentice—he was good for other things than playing patience!

When he returned home at the coffee hour, he had over a hundred *kroner*. Even so, he had all of the best houses yet to visit, he said—the homes of the quality set and of those who were on the fringe. He had desired to wait until these people had had their noonday naps and their coffee upon waking up. In the case of these better class families he was hoping to sell a ticket to each member of the household. This time he rode forth on his bicycle.

By half-past seven, when people had already begun to arrive at the theatre, the druggist's apprentice had sold his entire three hundred tickets. He had gone through Segelfoss Town from waterfront to Manor with a fine-tooth comb, and had succeeded in getting old and young alike to support this charitable undertaking. He now took his station in the ticket booth ready to sell many more tickets at the door to the swarms of folk he was expecting in from the country districts round about. Ay, an alert little chap, that druggist's apprentice. . . .

Eight-fifteen inside the theatre:

The house with its brand-new cement floor was practically full; it was splendid to see how nobly Segelfoss had responded on behalf of the late Solmund's family. The Anabaptist in South Parish and Nilsen in North Parish had left the scenes of their fervent endeavours, the spirit of religious revival had subsided throughout the parish and the inhabitants of Segelfoss had turned out in unexpected numbers to attend this "Entertainment to Raise Money." Even Aase was there, even Tobias from South Parish was there, along with his wife and his daughter Cornelia—ay, three *kroner* had come from Tobias alone!

And who was not there! That bright little girl of Davidsen's had, of course, not passed out her handbills in town, already so carefully combed by the druggist's apprentice; instead, she had gone out into the rural district, waited for church to let out and passed out her handbills there. A crafty idea on her part.

Naturally, all the officials and their families were present and the ladies would glance at the programme and ask each other questions concerning details they themselves seemed to find obscure. Cembalo? they said. Iliad? they said. "Yes, that must be a musical expression," one of them answered. The pastor's wife, Fru Landsen, sat there with her dove-like face and was dainty and petite, and she didn't speak at all, and all she did was blush. And Gammelmoderen was there in her new dress from the store,

as were all the rest of the Consul's people. Each ticket had been paid for with a *krone*, but when Lawyer Pettersen arrived with his wife, he immediately announced his intention of entering free of charge, as head of the company which owned the theatre. There was some discussion; the druggist's apprentice came dashing out of his booth and stood on his toes and was furious, and, when the lawyer and his wife, without further ado, went stalking into the theatre, the lad cried out through the open door to the assembled multitude: "Here come the only people who got in without paying!" No, that little apprentice, he was not to be trifled with. And even when the widow Solmund arrived with all her little ones and asked to go in free, he was forced to deny them permission. "It's the principle of the thing," said the druggist's apprentice.

The performers had chosen for themselves a little room backstage and there they were now assembled. Each held a glass, and, over in one corner, Vendt was pouring from a number of bottles he had been thoughtful enough to provide. Vendt himself was talking, for the most part, in French.

Fru Hagen, the postmaster's wife, glanced at the programme and looked up, startled. "Why, what in the world is this!" she exclaimed. "What do you mean, a string quintette?" she asked.

"String quintette and cembalo," answered Holm.

Fru Hagen laughed desperately and asked: "But who—yes, I mean who will——?"

"I shall," said Holm.

"Oh dear, I shall faint! Hahaha! See, Vendt? He is mad as I've told you!"

A quarter of an hour dragged by and, out in the theatre, the gentlemen in the audience were already glancing at their watches and muttering behind their hands that it was time for the show to begin. Doctor Lund was holding hands with his wife beneath the latter's shawl.

In due time the accordion player arrived, a country

boy in his early twenties, quiet and matter-of-fact, accustomed to playing for dances. Down front stood a table and two chairs and the lad, realizing at a glance that this was to be his station, strolled leisurely down the aisle, seated himself atop the table and immediately began to play.

A song which all in his parish could hum, not such a bad tune, either—grew better and better as it went along, two good bass notes, it had. His fellow-parishioners were loyal supporters of this music-man of theirs, and at the conclusion of his number a few of the younger element made strenuous attempts to get up a little applause; however, as no one took it up, they were embarrassed and slumped down in their seats.

The lad sat idle on the table for a brief while, swung his legs and coolly looked into the faces of the audience. Then, without further ado, he struck up again, this time something he had heard on a phonograph record—a winsome melody, Weber, a tune which was gentle to the ears. Fru Lund—little Esther from Polden—sat there trying to conceal the fact that she was moved.

And this constituted the first number on the programme.

The next was Hotelkeeper Vendt—a lecture which simply missed fire. No, he ought to have sat down by the table and merely told one of his stories. He made a great mistake by standing up. He was grandly attired in full-dress, but he ought to have recognized his own limitations. His act fell flat. Vendt well up in affairs? The class struggle, prohibition, the art of the theatre, the shipping industry? What, Vendt a politician, or a mere intellectual? To be sure, he lectured on none of these subjects, but he approached to within perilously close range of them all and he even took a few potshots at them. Not that he was downright terrible, for Vendt could never be that, and now and then, when he attempted to be funny, he was able to draw a chuckle from both the pastor and

the magistrate. But anyone could have delivered just such a lecture and, at length, Vendt was sufficiently the artist to realize this himself. After a quarter of an hour, he broke off abruptly and disappeared. When a patter of applause ran through the audience, he turned and backed out of sight. Some there were who were with the man at this point—he had made his exit so charmingly!

The third number on the programme consisted of two gramophone records and this was because Fru Hagen had suddenly become nervous and had pitifully begged for a delay. Singular indeed that she, the only one equipped with genuine talent, should have been the only one afflicted with nervousness. And when her emotion had not subsided at the conclusion of the second gramophone record, confusion reigned backstage.

"Let's take the first intermission!" said Vendt. He and the druggist were busy in the corner with certain bottles.

"No, let me sing now," said Gina i Roten.

"Yes, God bless you, Gina dear, please do!" begged the postmaster's wife.

But this required the presence of Druggist Holm as guitar accompanist, and, at the moment, he was truly in no fit condition to appear in public. He had unfortunately injured his finger, he said, look there, it was swollen. "Say, Karel, can't you go in and play for Gina?" he asked.

"Ay," said Karel, "if as you think me good enough."

The audience was growing restless and the hum of voices was growing louder. Ah, but there came Gina i Roten and her husband! The house fell silent as the pair sat down by the table.

Renowned for her singing in church and at prayer meetings, she was. And tonight she was dressed a bit finer than usual in a green waist with large buttons up the front and a handsome home-made skirt in which she had once carried hay and which she had again borrowed for the present occasion. Her costume could not have been

improved upon; it created the proper impression, for she was appearing as no more than a farmer's wife from South Parish—God bless her, this was what she was, and this was good enough. Furthermore, she had had a glass of something which Vendt had handed her and a glow was in her blood.

Druggist Holm had been out to Roten a few times and had tried to teach her a few things. But she had probably not understood a word of his instruction, had said "Ay," to all he had said and had hustled into her clothes as though the devil were after her. She had refused to learn a love song or a ballade because of the piety induced by her recent baptism—no, they would have to be satisfied with those hymns of hers. She could not sing, but she had a deep breast and a throat.

Karel began to strum "*Den gamle kristelige Dagvise*"; he could hardly be said to play, but he could harmonize, he could wheedle a good bit of music out of a mere guitar. Then Gina's voice came in and Heavens, it was as though she had simply taken a chance and come in anywhere, regardless of the accompaniment!

One verse, two verses, three—ay, but the hymn had nine verses in all. Gina was generous and was going to sing them all. At the end of the fifth verse, the pastor rose from his seat in the first row, leaned far forward and begged her to pause for a breath. "Spare yourself a bit for the next hymn! You sing more beautifully than any other living creature, Gina!" he said.

"Yes! Yes!" cried people here and there in the audience.

Gina smiled back at him and, in conclusion, sang two watchman's songs. Then she and her husband retired, according to instructions.

First intermission.

It was now time for Fru Hagen to make her appearance. Naturally her numbers went splendidly and every-

one applauded. She returned to the "green room" as happy as a child. "I didn't think I could do it!" she said, half-laughing, half-sobbing.

Vendt had, by this time, become so occupied with his bottles that he began to hum aloud.

"Shut up!" said Holm.

"I'm practicing," replied Vendt. "Don't you know that I have a French number to do?"

"So do all of us have numbers to do," said Holm, insulted. "You're forgetting my string quintette with cembalo."

Fru Hagen clapped her hand over her mouth to keep from laughing.

They spent so much time talking, the audience became restless again. The programme now called for "The Iliad," an accordion number with the singular title, "The Iliad."

"What's that?" asked the country lad who was scheduled to perform it.

"The most rousing march you can play," said Holm. "Bismarck's March. Karel will go out with you and yodel the melody."

Karel apologized, and said that as a newly baptised man he could indulge in no such frivolity at this time.

Yes, but this was no frivolous number—it wasn't a dance piece, it was a march, the next thing to a hymn! They succeeded in talking him over, gave him another glass, sent him out to face the audience.

This number was received with tumultuous applause; the younger element recognized their march, their musician and their yodeler—they stood on the seats and yelled their appreciation.

"Now I'm going on!" said Vendt, pulling himself together.

"It isn't a moment too soon for my own number," said Holm.

"*Après moi,*" said Vendt, literally bubbling over with happy emotion.

"Good Lord!" whispered Fru Hagen, after he had gone on. "He'll drive the audience away!"

They heard him sing "*Je suis à vous, Madame.*" Dashed if he hadn't made good his threat! Well, but there was at least one member of the audience who understood the words—Consul Gordon Tidemand—but not even he was familiar with the melody. . . . A voice which was forever failing to register the correct pitch. . . . Occasionally it had the quality of a properly vibrant string, but each time it would suddenly burst its bonds and end up in a high squeal. One would require a special talent to produce such ludicrous effects. Vendt himself noticed nothing unusual in his manner of singing; he sang, as it were, so innocently, and when he had finished, the audience applauded. And the applause, he likewise accepted in good faith. The audience must have clapped their hands to create the impression that they understood the French, though the language of the song was that used by the serving class in France.

Vendt bowed his thanks and beamingly returned to the others. From then on his superciliousness knew no bounds.

"What now?" asked the others.

"Intermission," said Vendt.

After the intermission Fru Hagen made her second appearance. She was no longer nervous; she walked in, played her Mozart charmingly and received tumultuous applause. When she returned, she said: "I could have kept on all night!"

They looked at their watches. An hour and a half had elapsed since the opening number.

Vendt and the druggist were busy with their bottles; they poured each other drinks, swallowed them down, filled the others' glasses and when they were empty offered to fill them again. "No thanks!" said Gina with a laugh.

But she had become mellow and co-operative and, when the druggist urged her to sing love songs in place of the hymns listed for her second group, she turned to her husband and asked him what he thought of the idea. And yes, Karel had himself just finished another glass and was quite of the same opinion.

She began humming: "*Venlige Aftenvind, flyv med min Klage hen til min Ven*—Dear winds of eventide, bear to my lover my heart's fond lament."

Holm: "Splendid, Gina! And you, Karel, no doubt you can strum the accompaniment?"

"Ay, and that I can."

"Oh, that will be delightful!" exclaimed Fru Hagen. "I'm going out front to listen. *Adieu!*"

As there were fourteen stanzas in the *Sjømandsbrudens Klage*, it was too much to expect that Gina should sing any more that evening. Holm said: "At the end of that song, they'll clap like mad, you may be sure. You will turn to come back, but still they will go on applauding. When you get to the door here, just turn around and raise your hand a little—they'll all fall silent at that. And then, Gina, just at that point, you will sing out that cow-call of yours. Do you understand?"

Gina smiled. "Will that go?" she asked.

"Will it go! Why, that will be a magnificent encore after all you have sung this evening, a splendid closing number for our programme. You must stand there just as you do on the knoll, calling in your cows in the evening."

"Ay," said Gina.

"What shall I do?" asked Karel.

"You'll come back in here to us. Now go on out, both of you!"

They heard how gratefully the audience received this pair. Dead silence for a moment, then Gina lifted her voice. The miracle repeated itself. This time it was only

the lament of a sailor's bride, but it was vibrant with sweetness and sorrow. No one begged her to pause for a long breath this time; some sat there bravely with a smile on their faces, others made no effort to conceal their tears. Fourteen stanzas of love, the emotion which everyone recognized—the young people in the audience were probably at the time experiencing the divine madness themselves, whilst their elders sat there remembering the day—the day——

Holm was right, the house went wild with applause. Gina moved toward the door, followed by a continuing roar of applause. She turned and raised her hand and immediately the audience was silent. Expectantly they waited for something unusual to happen, and happen it did at once—an even-song of the moorland, from a knoll a voice which swept the moor, a song without words, but a perfect deluge of melody—Gina, calling home her creatures.

The audience realized that this was the final number. They applauded and rose from their chairs, continued to clap their hands as they stood moving toward the aisles. After the performance, a few remained standing about the entrance to discuss the entertainment.

Meanwhile Vendt and the druggist were settling a bit of an account backstage and, in truth, their affair might have degenerated into almost anything, but for the fact that the two were friends. They were furthermore fellow-Bergensers and were soon able to reconcile their differences.

Vendt, to begin with, spoke in friendly wise to the druggist: "Look here—it's not to boast about myself—that's certainly not my intention—but after the pleasure I've given, I'd like to remind you that—I mean, when Gina has finished singing, I don't see why you——"

Holm, deeply wounded, yes, downright annoyed by the other's exuberance: "I understand very well what you're driving at, Vendt—you're trying to discredit my act!"

"No, my dear fellow, don't take it like that!"

"Shut up, I've known it the whole time. There was that little number of mine—string quintette with cembalo—but you were envious of me, you begrudged me my success—you were afraid that your own would——"

"Hey?" exploded Vendt.

"Yes, I'll say it straight out. You begrudged me the roar of applause and all those cries of 'Bravo!' which you yourself didn't get!"

Vendt, speechless with amazement: "——Did you ever hear anything to equal that, Fru Hagen!"

"Fru Hagen has gone," said the druggist.

"Hm. But the accordion player is still with us. And he knows how warmly I was received. There were many who stood up to applaud."

"Yes, but when *I* went on!" exclaimed Holm. "There wasn't a dry eye in the house, and they refused to let me go. But you, you never have a thought for anyone but yourself!"

Vendt, bored with the whole business: "That may all be, but I'm willing to let the audience decide between us. It was my hope to spare you, but now you can go right on and meet your fate!"

"Now?" sputtered Holm. "Now? Gina is singing now and after she is finished the show is over."

"Over?" asked Vendt. "How so?" He drew a little song-book from his side pocket. "I have more to put on!" he said.

"I don't doubt it. I had something myself, but——"

Vendt: "Very well, then, let's see who'll be next!"

But no, the performance was over and Holm was crushed—he had given up all thought of his number.

This touched Vendt. "All in all, nothing is ever over," he said. "And I'm now of a mind to see that you get your chance. You and I will go on as a male chorus."

"As a chorus?"

"And hold a singing contest."

It was at this point that the audience had burst forth with a tumult of applause for Gina's singing of the *Sjømandsbrudens Klage*. Karel came into the room and Vendt immediately offered him a drink. "You deserve it, Karel!" he said. "Where is Fru Hagen? We all deserve a little something," he said and tossed off his own glass.

Gina was beginning her cow-call. An upward avalanche of tone. In a few minutes she had finished and herself returned to the "green room."

Vendt said: "Come here, Gina. You deserve this! . . . Now we'll go on, Holm!" He was highly emotional, ready to go through fire and water for his friend. "Come on!"

"Wouldn't you rather be alone with it?" asked Holm.

"No, we're a male chorus," said Vendt.

He did not notice that the house was empty, that only a few stragglers had halted at the door; he was absorbed in his own thoughts and was madly pawing through his song-book as he made his way out to the table. He pawed through the book from cover to cover, then began again back at the beginning. "Sit down!" he said to Holm.

They took their seats, one at either side of the table.

"I can't seem to find anything," said Vendt. "We'll have to take the alphabet for our text!"

"The devil!" said Holm. "The alphabet?"

Vendt began singing at once; he was uncontrollable and would stop at nothing. A hair-raising hymn to life it proved to be, and quite unlike any other song in this world, including even itself. Holm followed as best he could and got in many a splendid howl, though as a minnesinger he held no brief for his own powers. Possibly he had too good an ear for music. . . .

One of those who had paused at the door was Pastor Ole Landsen. "They're drunk," he said. But he did not flee because of it. On the contrary, Pastor Landsen found a seat and sat down.

Of course they were drunk. As though neither of them knew the alphabet by heart, they primly sang from the book which they held between them across the table.

Their little informal audience at the door began to laugh and their laughter increased as the song went on. Oh those two monkeys! And the pastor laughed as loudly as any of the others. What else could he do? The text of this song differed radically from every known form of lyric and the resulting melody was imbued with all the frightful wantonness of modern jazz. But in this instance, at least, the art was quite unpremeditated, there was no attempt to endow it with significance; the song was uttered impromptu and the jazz effect was considerably enhanced by Vendt's miraculously breaking voice. . . . This was no game, it was as serious as nature itself. The two men were drunk and were becoming more and more forgetful of where they were.

Coming to the letter Q, Vendt began to show signs of emotion; his mood was contagious and even the druggist was soon deeply touched. At the back of the house their audience was moaning with laughter. The singers were giving of their best; each waved his free hand gently to and fro during tender and plaintive passages. They sang the concluding letters of the alphabet in a manner which was downright voluptuous and with tears streaming down their cheeks.

The pastor, too, had tears trickling down the countless wrinkles of his face—tears of laughter.

When their last notes died away, Vendt returned the book to his pocket, rose and staggered "off stage." The druggist followed him with his eyes; he had probably gained the faint impression that there were people at the

back of the theatre and it was his thought to save what still could be saved. He carefully took his bearings and, without staggering, made a dash for the door.

The place seemed empty after the departure of the pair. Down front now stood simply a table and two chairs. At the back of the hall a small group of people still stood and laughed, held their sides and explained to each other the particular things they were laughing at.—“Those mad fellows!” they said.

“Yes,” answered Pastor Ole Landsen. “But there are worse things we can do to each other than to make each other laugh.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

UNMITIGATED joy was not to be the druggist's lot as a result of his evening entertainment. He went the following day to Gina i Roten and gave her fifty *kroner*, a well-earned reward for her contribution to the programme. However, he made the grave mistake of letting the widow Solmund know of his act, for her envy was thus bestirred and much quarreling came as a result. "I thought as 'twas all to be mine," said the widow Solmund. "I've so many as need it!"

"You'd better be satisfied with what you're getting," said the druggist. "Here you are—three hundred fifty!"

But the widow Solmund was not satisfied. It irked her to be forced to divide with another, she did no end of talking in her neighbourhood, and one day she went to Gina i Roten and demanded the money.

No, Gina was hardly of a mind to hand back any of this money. The fact of the matter was, she had given the fifty *kroner* to Karel who, in turn, had handed the money over to the bank to apply on the mortgage against his farm.

The widow let out a scream: "Ho! Well now I must say——! To pay off your debts with my money!"

"Your money? No, this was money as we got from the druggist."

"Then he gave away money as didn't belong to him and for that he can go to prison! You can tell that to that druggist of yours from me!"

"No no, he's no man to be giving away money as doesn't belong to him."

"You must have got it for being good to him," suggested the widow.

"You swine!" replied Gina. "And now you're to get out of my house, do you hear!"

They stepped out into the yard, but there they pursued their quarrel.

"Ay, then what did you get the money for?" challenged the widow.

"What did I get it for? Didn't I sing the whole evening long to amuse them as had come to the theatre?"

"Sang!" snorted the widow. "Was that anything to pay money for!"

"Ay, and that Karel, he played the whole evening long together with me."

"Played!" the widow snorted again. "No, for such big money as that you must have been good to him both early and late and a good many times. Of that I'm as sure as can be!"

"Karel!" screamed Gina at the top of her lungs.

Karel was busy draining water from a certain pond on his property. He thrust his spade into a pile of soft earth and hastened back to the house.

The widow Solmund made no move to avoid the interview; her jealousy had been unexpectedly aroused and she rattled on excitedly: "And what he sees in you is more than I've a mind to make out. You're little enough to look at and less than that to touch."

Gina was helpless and sought refuge in tears.

"And for the matter of that, there are those of us who are younger than you," the widow continued desperately.

Gina sniffled and found difficulty in expressing herself. "There I'd just been baptised and all that, but then he asked me to sing and help you to some money for the coming winter. But now you're just like a beast to me. . . . Karel, she's here after that money."

"What money?" asked Karel.

"The money we got."

The widow waded in at once: "All I say is I've never

heard of anyone as got good money for just singing—and my money, too! Isn't it so as I've little ones? And aren't they needing both food and clothes?"

"You're here for the druggist?" asked Karel.

"No, I'm here for myself," answered the widow. "I'm not the kind as goes visiting about with the druggist and him with me. I leave that to some others to do!"

"You must go home," said Karel.

The widow: "And if as he had given her the money for a paper of coffee, it wouldn't be me that would say anything. But a sum to be thought of with house and farm——"

"Home with you!" said Karel. "Home with you!"

"Ay, how will it be, then? Do I get my money?"

"I'll talk to the druggist about you and tell him how you are."

"Do it! And tell him from me that there's prison for the likes of those as give away other folks' money!"

The widow even undertook to make a personal call upon the druggist; she was surely no meek one. She desired to know whether it was really for singing a couple of hymns that Gina i Roten had got all that money, or whether there had been something else. . . .

What else could there be?

Ay, that was the very matter she had come to investigate.

There was nothing else.

Folk were mumbling about one thing or another, she said. In her neighbourhood there was some talk about Gina and the druggist.

"You're crazy!" said the druggist. "Go on, get out! I don't want you here any longer!"

"They say as she's here after you both early and late."

"No, it is you who keep running here all the time. But now it is my desire to be rid of you. Get out!"

"So long as we're talking about that," she keeps on,

"a riddle it is what you see in that Gina to please you! And her husband all alive and all that! Another thing it is entirely with both me and my little ones, idle and uncared for as we are——"

Druggist Holm was in truth profoundly annoyed, but wasn't he likewise obliged to sit there laughing and wounding the widow Solmund to her very soul? How could he help it? "See here," he said. "Must I ask my apprentice to step in and carry you outdoors?"

"You don't have to," she answered stiffly. "All I say is that 'twas my money as you gave away and now I'll find out if that's lawful. For I've little ones needing both food and clothes."

No, the widow Solmund was surely no meek one. Even after the druggist's apprentice had been called in to lend a hand, she dodged him for a time and continued her tirade. And when, at length, she was on the way out, she got a good grip on the door jamb and was not to be pried loose for some moments. "The devil and all must be in you," said the lad. "And that's why you're here!"

In spite of her coarse, forbidding nature, the widow Solmund was possessed of certain good qualities: she clad her children in new clothes from top to toe before she even began to make a single new undergarment for herself. All that her wretched life afforded, everything to the last shred, was first of all for her children. "Here, children," she would say. "Take all you want, it's yours!" Maternal solicitude is part of any mother's love for her children, but with her it was a steady flame, her entire life's occupation, frequently taking the form of crude avariciousness. Ay, all was for the sake of her children. Her assault upon Gina i Roten, her jealousy, these had been no product of feminine wantonness; all had been merely the result of bitterness over the loss of fifty *kroner* she might have spent on her children. What might not they have had for this money!

But the druggist, poor chap, had no end of trouble with the widow—she simply refused to give in. At length she offered him a compromise along with an ultimatum; he could either give her half the disputed amount or she would go to the magistrate. The druggist tore his hair and possibly would have met her terms, had he not realized that all fair-minded people would be on his side in the matter. Vendt of the hotel was his loyal friend during these decidedly painful days, and Gammelmoderen, in her fine new dress, was at all times ready to tease him about that crazy widow of his.

"I'll never be rid of her!" he complained.

Gammelmoderen could not refrain from laughing to hear his remark. "You sound so sad!" she said.

"Sad! I could scream!"

"Hahaha!"

They stopped in to see Vendt, and afterward, as usual, they went for a stroll up the new road. The road was now finished the whole way up to the lodge. Workmen were still raking gravel in a few places, but quite without supervision, without a soul to guide their efforts.

The work crew had been cut down to four men; the remainder had already left for the south and Benjamin and his young friend had likewise been laid off. But there was no longer enough work to keep even these four men busy, and day after day they waited for their boss to return, but day after day went by and he failed to appear. No, he was ill in bed and the doctor had left orders that he was to stay there for another week at least. When he decided to take matters into his own hands and get up anyway, Blonda and Stina carried off his clothes and hid them. Ay, Baptist sisters were nought save a plague and a nuisance!

He directed the work from his bed. Each evening the men would come to him for orders covering the following day, and thus matters progressed tolerably well. But now

the men had absolutely nothing left to do—aside from the cementing down of the iron fencing along the edge of two steeps at the roadside, a task demanding such specialized knowledge that they refused to undertake it without the presence of their boss.

The workmen now found it possible to loaf and have an easy time of it. However, this was not to their liking, either; they were accustomed to strenuous physical exertion and they thrived best when, at quitting time, they could look back upon a good day's work accomplished. So when Druggist Holm appeared on the road with his lady, they began complaining to him and at length they begged him to see what he could do about getting that boss of theirs back on his feet. They were fairly well acquainted with the druggist and could thus open up their hearts to him. He was a good sport and, on occasion, had more or less lawfully passed them out a drop of strong drink. Furthermore, they had, to a man, attended that marvelous entertainment of his and had screeched with laughter over his informal finale with Vendt. Dashed if they hadn't got their money's worth!

"No, how can I get that boss of yours back on his feet?" asked the druggist. "Why don't you speak to the doctor about it?"

"We're stuck to know what to do," they complained. "This is far from the kind of work we ought to be doing, and here's this fencing we're supposed to set up, but still he doesn't come. The worst of it is, he's holding us up, for we're supposed to put in a concrete cellar for that fellow they call the Buttonhead when we're through here. But we can't seem to get through here, and it's hard telling what day winter will be upon us, and when winter comes we won't be able to do the work——"

"A concrete cellar for the lawyer?"

"Cellar and foundation for a house. He's to build next spring. So if the Herr Druggist will only speak to the

doctor to let that boss of ours up so he can come up here and help us, it will certainly be a big favour to us."

"I'll be glad to speak to the doctor. . . ."

Druggist Holm strolls with his lady all the way up to the lodge and together they sit down outside. Such a cabin as it is, too!—freshly painted and attractive, and now if the Consul hadn't hit upon the idea of painting a brown semicircle over each of the windows! They looked exactly like eyebrows—modernity's contribution to the art of exterior decoration!

Holm: "Hm, so Pettersen's going to build!"

"Yes, what an odd fancy on his part!"

"Well, I've likewise thought something of building, but it doesn't seem as though I could afford it."

"Is the drugstore becoming too small quarters for you?"

"Yes, regarded in a certain light."

Gammelmoderen gave this remark some thought. "I can't see what people want with such large houses," she said. "Why must Pettersen build? There are only the two of them."

"Thus may one speak who dwelleth in a castle."

"Yes, we are utterly lost in all those rooms of ours. We haven't even got names for them all. We're simply running wild. We use one of the guest rooms simply as a closet for old vests!"

"Wonder how many rooms there are here?" mutters Holm, gazing up at the lodge.

"Three, I believe. And that's altogether too many," she says. "Three would be enough anywhere. That is, not counting the drugstore," she added indiscreetly.

"Would three rooms be enough—not counting the drugstore?"

"Quite. Regarded in any light."

The devil of a plain-spoken woman there! And such a mouth and breast! Especially in that tastefully selected

dress she wore. Grey, trimmed with maroon. He had never seen anything more beautiful.

"I love you," he said.

She gazed at him calmly, then blushed charmingly and immediately lowered her gaze. Other than this, she showed no signs of emotion; she had the peasant's tendency to conceal her deepest feelings. "You may do so," she said gently and simply.

He had, on previous occasion, mentioned to her something to this effect, had come right out with it, but more in a spirit of capricious flirtation. This time his declaration was not to be misunderstood. He picked up her hand and held it, she glancing alternately at him and at the ground. She was unable to mask her delight and to this she at length gave an expression he was later never able to forget: she carried his hand to her breast and held it there. A gesture far sweeter than words . . .

They sat there for a long time talking back and forth. They were agreed. Yes, they could build them a little house—that is, they would do nothing of the sort—the two rooms and kitchen over the drugstore would be sufficient. They would continue to receive a subsidy from his family in Bergen—out of the question! They would refuse to accept a single penny from this source in the future. They could journey to Bodø to be married there—but no, they were agreed that such would prove too expensive, then they were agreed that such would be necessary, after all, in order not to turn Segelfoss topsy-turvy.

They kissed each other like two mad youngsters in love.

"I am so much older than you," she said.

He lied, made himself out to be a few years older than he really was, and there they were of an age!

"I'm a widow and all that," she said.

"And for that matter I might easily be a widower myself," he said significantly.

She was exceedingly happy; she was fond of him and

clung to him, bent his head to her lips and kissed him without being asked. Naturally, she was versed in this delicate art; naturally, she knew all the tricks.

"Just think," he said, "I don't even know your first name."

"It is Lydia," she answered.

"And mine is Konrad."

They both laughed over this tardy presentation; it was so amusing to have learned each other's given names after they had become betrothed! After all, how little names mattered!

The sun had set, the air was growing chilly and they made ready to set out for home.

"If only you had a key, we might perhaps have gone inside," he said.

"I don't even know if we'd find anything to sit on."

"Let's investigate!"

They walked over to the house, placed their hands against the glass and peered through the windows. They went from window to window, and at length she turned the corner to look through the bay-window—when she returned, she was as pale as a corpse.

"No, there's nothing to sit on," she said and clutched him by the arm. "Come, let us go!"

She had seen something. For the second time in her life, she had seen something around a certain corner.

They had been walking a short way when the silence was rent by a howl.

"What in the name of Heaven——?" he asked and halted in his tracks.

"No, just come along!" she urged. "It's nothing."

"Are you sure it was nothing——?"

"Probably someone who is drunk. We'll meet the workmen down the road a way—we'll ask them."

But the workmen had gone home. The road was deserted.

Holm: "You don't suppose that was the cry of some

Siren, do you? The sound was surely fiendish enough!"

"Yes!" she made haste to reply. "That must have been what it was!"

"Or a wild Indian?"

"Hahaha!"

They parted company on the grounds which surrounded the Manor, but as they could be seen from the house, they did not pause to kiss. They dared not even take each other by the hand. Holm merely raised his hat and said: "Good-bye until tomorrow!"

He was in a partially confused state of mind as he thought over the day's happenings and he was in no mood to return home immediately. As the south-bound mail steamer was just circling in from the fjord he decided to stroll down to the pier.

The ship was in when he arrived. He saw packing cases going aboard and packing cases coming ashore, Gordon Tidemand's name on all of them. Yes, here was business and turnover! The usual spectators were in evidence: children and grown-ups and dogs. The usual rattle of chains, the usual rumble of freight. But Alexander was not on the pier, as usual. In his place he had sent the gardener Steffen with certain cases of smoked salmon.

A chef in white linen uniform and tall cap stepped to the rail with a bucket of swill. Emptying it overboard, a flock of screaming seagulls immediately swooped down to snap up these appetizing morsels. Later a stoker emptied ashes through an opening in the hold of the ship. Sailors and passengers moved about on deck. The bosun stood at the gangplank to take tickets.

The Consul arrived in his car; he drove straight out on the pier and was seen by one and all. He stepped out, dashingly attired in a handsome suit of clothes, brightly polished shoes and yellow gloves. He spoke a few words to the captain aloft on the bridge, turned to the gardener Steffen and asked why Alexander was not present, made a

hasty inspection of the entire pier, gave the warehouse superintendent an order about some new goods, glanced at his watch, climbed back into his car and drove away.

That mighty master of Segelfoss!

Holm stared after him. My step-son, he thought to himself, hanged if he isn't my own personal step-son! Her name is Lydia, mine Konrad, and we are agreed that——

A passenger steps ashore. She is old of face, but her expression is keen and alert. She is wearing a home-made skirt and a cloak of black cloth, and in her hands she is carrying a basket and an umbrella. On the pier she stops short, glances about her for a few moments, and for one reason or another picks out the druggist to accost. She steps up to him and asks: "Excuse me, but can you tell me a hotel?"

"Yes, certainly," replies the druggist, raising his hat. "Come with me, for I too am bound for the hotel. Permit me to carry that basket of yours."

"No, thanks," the lady replies with a smile. "I'm old enough to be able to carry it all by myself. You live in the hotel?"

"No, I live over the drugstore. I'm the druggist here in town."

"Ho, so you're the druggist! I could see at once that there was something extra about you. And you even wanted to carry this basket of mine!"

Arriving in the hotel, the druggist spoke to Vendt. "I have here a guest," he said.

Vendt bowed.

"A guest?" said the lady. "Hardly to be called a guest. All I'll be wanting is a tiny wee room, if you can put me up with that. I've food in this basket of mine."

Vendt bowed again. "You must feel yourself at home!" he said.

"Now that's real nice of you," said the lady. "Ay ay, and here I've the food I'm to eat, so I suppose you can

give me a cup of coffee or two to drink with it? I'll pay you for that, of course! It's only right and proper that everything should be talked over and arranged for beforehand."

She clipped on a pair of nose-glasses and in brisk style signed the hotel register: Paulina Andreassen from Polden. Unmarried. "I don't dare write down my age," she said gaily. "If I did you'd think me so old and broken-down you'd be sure to have trouble with me. And I don't want you to believe such a thing as that!"

"The question of age is unnecessary," said Vendt.

"The druggist here was kind enough to bring me up to this hotel of yours," she said. "And now you shall have my many thanks, Herr Druggist! Do you know what?" she said, turning again to the proprietor. "He wanted to carry this basket for me! I can't get over it!"

"Oh yes, the druggist certainly knows his way about with the fair sex!" exclaimed Vendt. Glancing at the register, he asked: "Would you mind adding your occupation?"

"Oh, I must have forgotten that!" she said. And all the while she was adjusting her glasses and writing in the register she continued to talk away. "My occupation is to keep busy with one thing or another," she said. "I have a little store back home in Polden, and I have the mail to take care of, and a little lodging house to put folk up, and besides that we have a farm, and that brother of mine, he's the head-man of the village—he's been at it for nearly a human generation now! So praise be to God, we have all we need according to our humble wants in life and more than that we're content to let alone. But now you mustn't mind if I ask you about something: Do you know a man here in Segelfoss by name of August? Naturally, there may be a good many here called August, but the one I mean came here traveling——"

"Oh yes, I know whom you mean," said the druggist. "I know him well."

"Ho, so he's here and alive and all that?"

"And all that! He's been a bit ill of late and he's been in bed for a time, but he'll be up almost any day now. You'll find him up at the Manor."

"What's his work here?"

"A little of this and that. He's the Consul's right-hand man. He does everything under the sun. They call him Altmulig here."

"Ay, it's that August or nobody else who can do *alt mulig*! Well if it isn't just splendid that I've found him and didn't come here on a fool's errand! But now you must tell me, since I'm asking all these questions: Doctor Lund and that wife of his, they're getting along all right?"

"Oh yes, they're getting along fine."

"For Fru Lund, she's from up home where I come from, and I watched her grow up from a size no bigger than my fist. And those parents of hers, they live right there in our village and they'll be asking me all about her. Doctor Lund, he used to be our doctor, he was with us for some time and he married one of our girls and all that. Ay, that's the way it is. And now I've come here to see that August—a business trip I may as well call it—and that's why I'm asking after him. No other reason in the world."

She talked and she talked. Her final remarks were: "Ay ay, and so if I may have a tiny little room—I'd just go there and have a wee cup of coffee—for the coffee on the ship was simply not fit to drink. I forgot to ask what my room is to cost——"

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

AUGUST has been in bed for several days, but the doctor, fearing certain complications as the result of his patient's immoderate debauch, has ordered him for a few more days to stay where he is.

On the whole, August is in no immediate distress; his Baptist sisters are giving him the best of care—they sit there talking religion with him, and their hours together bear a strong resemblance to prayer meetings.

But could he afford the time to keep lying there flat on his back? Had he not promised to turn over a certain finished road to the Consul on a certain definite date? And that date had now passed and two fences had yet to be installed and here he was in bed! Indeed fate's paths were dark and devious.

Glancing at himself in the mirror, he observed that his face had lost flesh. But had he not taken up religion for the purpose of bettering his condition and getting some benefit out of life? Well then, if he couldn't get up and appear well, what was the sense in baptism and all that hocus-pocus? If he were to remain bed-ridden for several more weeks and thus grow simply that much older to no end, what would Cornelia have to say about that?

It was all very well to be religious but it was a ghastly tedious business. He couldn't take a single bite of food into his mouth without first pausing to thank the Lord for His bounty, and he couldn't even send for the small dealer in town to come up and play cards with him on the bed. What was there for him, then? His sisters in the cause of God had even gone so far as to remind him that he was indulging in acts of sheer worldliness to shave as often as

he did. How could such women ever understand a man who had fallen in love with a girl? It was not to be denied that it had been much simpler for him to live life before his recent baptism, divinely religious as he had been even then, with a sign of the cross over forehead and breast for each and every occasion.

It was utterly impossible for him to lie there completely inert; diligently he cut notches in the back of the chair at his bedside and many times a day he would get out his revolver and examine it and polish it.

"Come on, no more fooling now! Let me have those clothes of mine!" he ordered.

"We don't dare," answered Blonda and Stina.

"If you don't, I'll scream," he threatened. "And I'll swear so that lightnings will flash about your ears!"

"Are you out of your head? Lie still! We'll phone the doctor and hear what he has to say."

Day after day they soothed him, told him white lies to keep him quiet: the doctor wasn't home, the doctor was furious and ordered him to be tied down in bed.

They had even been on the point of summoning help to tie him down, those beasts! And with that he had altered his tactics. "You're right!" he had said. "This is a test the Lord is putting me through—I'm still too sinful to get up!" And not only when his good sisters were at his side, but when he was alone as well, did he try to improve himself and strengthen his feelings of piety by punishing himself and torturing himself in divers ways. Many times during the night he would weep, smite himself in the face and pinch his body till it hurt. But what good did all that do? he would ask himself in the morning. Didn't I fall to dreaming about her as soon as I was asleep?

"I can just as well sit up in bed," he craftily said to his sisters. "Let me have that coat of mine!"

But his sisters were no less crafty. "Here's a woollen blanket for you," they said.

He ground his false teeth. "Do you want to have me sitting here looking like a dummy?" he raged. "No, I'd rather stay lying down!" And, to himself, he wondered if next morning it might not be possible for him to effect an escape in his nightshirt.

But the next morning the greatest of miracles came into his life, and it was well he hadn't been sitting there bundled up in a blanket: a visitor from out of town was shown into his room, Paulina Andreassen from Polden!

He stared at her for a time. Old she now was, to be sure, but still wearing three articles forever traditional to her person—a white ribbon about her throat, a pearl ring on her finger and a hair-net over her hair. In addition to these, she was today wearing a kind of hat made from brown velvet. . . .

"No, is that you, Paulina!" he said.

"Ay, and so it seems!" she replied. "You were pretty good to know me again."

"As though I wouldn't know you again! You look just like you always did!"

It pleased her to hear this and she was sympathetic with him at once. "What's this I find? Is that August all sick and played out?"

"Ay, worse luck!" he said faintly. "The Lord has cast me down upon my bed of pain!"

Bed of pain! She seemed at once to recognize the August of old and smiled. "What's your trouble?" she asked.

"Oh, it's my chest that's worst of all right now. I've coughed up a good bit of blood."

"No need for you to worry over that," she said briskly. "It's only the young as can count that anything serious—consumption or the like. How did you get sick?"

"Ay—cast me down—I don't know——"

More clearly than ever could she recognize him now. "Well," she said, "I've heard that you got yourself baptised in the river below a big waterfall here and that it gave you a terrible cold."

"Ay," he said. "It was a mistake I didn't get it done to me in Java or some other warm country like that."

"Your real mistake was that you had it done to you at all. You were already baptised in the Christian faith, weren't you? What was the sense in getting baptised all over again?" she asked.

"But this was what they call total immersion in regular running water," he said.

"And if you weren't a goose to take stock in such nonsense as that!"

"But there was an evangelist here and he was after me all the time."

"And so?—Catch me bothering my head about a man like that! You might have died of it; didn't you know that?"

"Ay. But he said to me that if he couldn't do it to me, it wouldn't do the rest of them any good, either."

"So you sacrificed yourself? How gallant!"

"Ay. And you see, he got a grip on so many of us sinners here, and I didn't know how things would go with me, so I took up with religion."

Paulina smiled. "Took up with religion, did you, August!" she said.

"I had gone about crossing myself and reading the Bible in Russian and all that, but it didn't seem like that was anything but heathenish magic and Freemasonry. What do you think, Paulina?"

"I don't know anything about it."

"No, but after I was baptised I happened to go out on that field there where some men were having a fight. And that's one thing I certainly shouldn't have done, for it was the worst imitation of a fight I ever saw in my life and I stood there too long and got chilled."

"Ay, but why did you go?" snorted Paulina.

"No, I just wanted to—not because I had any desire to see blood or suchlike—but is it really anything to you why I went?"

August was in some doubt as to the attitude he should adopt toward her. Religious she was not, and he could only feel his way along with her. At length he decided to let her take the lead. Nor for that matter did she appear to be particularly concerned over anything he said or might say. She knew him too well, it seemed, and, after all, she had merely come to see him on a matter of business.

"Ay, August," she said. "I've come down here from Polden."

"Hm, Polden," he mumbled. "I'll never forget that Polden in spite of all the many places I've visited since last I was there."

"Since you wouldn't come to me, I had to come to you."

"As you see, Paulina, here I am in bed and out of everything——"

"Nonsense!" she said. "And now I've written to the judge from the hotel and told him I'm here myself."

"Hm. The judge, eh? Well well."

She drew a packet of papers from the pocket of her coat. "Here's the accounts as I've kept them to the last penny you got from us and we from you. You remember that morning?"

"Ay."

"That brother Edevart, he walked out along the road with you when you were running away from town. But then just a little while later we got news that you no longer had need to run away, for you had won a large sum of money in a lottery and could pay back every penny you owed and still have the best part left over. But you don't ask about that brother Edevart. He was my own brother and he was drowned when he went out to bring you back——"

"I know about that," said August quietly.

"He borrowed the mail-boat and he sailed out all by himself and he never came back."

"I know it."

"But I paid for the mail-boat which was lost out of this money of yours."

"What money? I have no money."

"Rubbish! And, just like that, I paid one thing after another that you owed for, both in Polden and in Vester-aalen, so you don't owe anyone anything now. Here's the account of everything!" she said, slapping her palm with the packet.

"I don't want to see any account or anything."

"Haha!" laughed Paulina, derisively. "No, and I didn't intend that you should have them. From what I can make out, you don't understand accounts any better now than you used to in the old days. It's the judge and the proper authorities who are to take these accounts and study them. For you are just like you were twenty years ago—you simply can't manage your own affairs, for you're a child or a bird on the wing."

"You're right, Paulina. I know of no bird as restless as I am."

"And here is the bank-book!" she said, slapping her hand with this. "Quite a sum of money has accumulated in this account of yours through all the years. And the money you can get either at the bank here or in Bodø."

She mentioned no specific sum and it was quite impossible that he should ask. Instead, he said: "I can't make out why you talk like you do, Paulina. I have no money coming to me from you. You know as well as I do that I gave you everything I left behind me when I went away from Polden."

Paulina nodded. "Ay, you're not so far wrong in that. And that's why I answered the judge like I did when I said that, so far as I knew, the money was mine, with the signatures of two witnesses to the paper. For it seemed to me that Sir August was just a wee bit too high and mighty to write and order me to send the money to him, instead of coming to me after it himself."

"True, I was too high and mighty."

"For how did I know you were the man you made yourself out to be?"

"No," August admitted with a shake of his head.

"And so," said Paulina, desirous of ending the discussion, "I had to come down here, since you wouldn't come to Polden."

"I was hoping to find the time, and I'd have come this week if I hadn't——"

"Rubbish! You've had plenty of time ever since last spring! But let's hear no more about that—you're to have this money of yours!" She neatly arranged the papers and tucked them back into the pocket of her coat.

August attempted one pitiful last wriggle. "That money is yours, Paulina!" he said.

She sniffed vehemently. "What do I want with it?" she asked. "I certainly don't need it and you needn't think for a minute I do. And that brother Joakim, he certainly doesn't have to come to me for anything—he's a single man and has a farm of his own."

There was a knock on the door and a maid from the kitchen entered with a tray of cakes and coffee.

"Goodness me!" exclaimed Paulina.

"The mistress heard as how you had a stranger in for a guest, Altmulig," the girl said.

"Ay, and what a stranger!" he declared emphatically.

"Now I simply refuse to be called such a thing as that!" said Paulina. "Here we've known each other since we toddled about as children and the Lord has given us many a year since then."

"Yes, miss, so now if you please!" said the girl and left the room.

Paulina, greatly enlivened: "Well, I must say the folk on this place here certainly aren't petty in their ways! Such a lovely plate of cakes!" She poured coffee for them both, lost no time in tasting of her own, smacked her lips

and smiled. "And such coffee! Oh my, oh my! Now certainly I will have to slip off this coat of mine and stay a while with you, August! What was that she called you—Altmulig?"

"Ay. Because I do everything there is to be done here in the Consul's service and everywhere else I go."

"My, there never was such coffee!" she said and took another swallow. "Are you pleased with it here?"

"That you should ask such a question! The lady of the house here is just like a sister to me!"

"Ay ay, so now I can tell you all the news from Polden," she said. "Those elegant houses you and that brother Edevart put up, there they stand beautifying the road running down to the boathouses."

"And the factory?" he asked in a voice which was barely audible.

"Ay, and the factory stands there just the way it did when you left it. I've tried my best to sell it for you, but nothing ever came of that."

"It isn't mine," said August.

"Well, but I paid back all the stockholders out of that money of yours. And I paid all the bills for the steel beams and the sheet iron roofing and the cement all out of that same money. So I don't know what else there can be standing against it—my, I've never tasted such delicious cakes! And such a lot of them! Here I'm eating and eating away and to see the plate you'd never think I'd had one!"

"You must keep right on and eat all you can."

"Ay, and there stands your factory the same as ever, so, for the matter of that, you could come home and start it up any day that you like. But what could you possibly make there? You worked at so many things when you were with us in Polden and some things were helpful and some things were hurtful, but what, after all, is there left today to show for all the hard work you put in? The expenses ate up the profits in whatever business undertaking you

touched your hand to, and is that the way factories are supposed to be run? No, that sister Hosea is probably the wisest one of all—she spins and she weaves and she sews her own clothes and she never buys so much as a stitch of underwear from me in my store. You got that Karolus to sell off his good fertile soil to make building lots and in the end he almost starved to death. You wanted that Ezra to plant Christmas trees on soil which yielded food! Hahaha! But you certainly came up against a tough one when you came up against that Ezra! Do you remember that, August? But for my part, I've nothing to complain about over the things you did in Polden, for it was me that got that big iron safe you bought for that bank of yours and for which I've daily use now for all the business papers belonging to me and the store and the Royal Mail and the village register and other official books belonging to that brother Joakim who is head-man there at home. Ay, and that bank of yours, August—how you ever could have thought up such a bank! But, thank the Lord in Heaven, I've arranged everything about that as about everything else, and paid back every man the money he lost through it, whether stockholder or depositor."

"I don't understand where you got hold of money enough to do all that," said August.

"I did it with the money I had of yours. It was your own money that did it."

"Ay, then I don't suppose there can be so very much left of it, then?" he questioned her.

She did not answer his query; instead, she drank coffee and devoured cakes. "Ay, I got the safe cheap enough, I did," she said. "But I cheated no one, least of all you."

"If I'd have been there I'd have given you the safe," he said.

"I know you would. You've never been petty or stingy in any of your dealings. But you've been a fool and a silly goose every time it came to looking out for your own interests. That's the opinion of this Paulina who says so."

It would be quite improper to find fault with her statement were he to pursue his policy of meekness and a broken heart in order to gain possession of a certain bank-book. Therefore, he merely asked: "About those spruce trees I set out, are they still alive?"

"Ay, nicely. Both at ours and several other places. The ones in the Inner Settlement, the long double row from the boat landing up to the church, they are alive, but they're slow to grow and they're still hardly bigger than house plants. But pretty to look at they are and I see them every time I go to church. They've now planted birches beside them to give them a wee bit of shelter. What was I going to say? Tomorrow I'll be going to see that Esther and that doctor of hers. Have you been up to their place?"

"Ay, a good many times. Finest sort of people, they are."

"I've greetings for her from her people. And then I must hear a sermon here before I go back home. They say your pastor here is worth listening to."

"Ay, and that's no lie."

"Have you heard him preach?"

"Every Sunday! What do you take me for!"

"But, first of all, I must go see the judge and take care of my business with him and get a receipt and all. Ay, and a pity it is, but I won't have time to wait over for that sermon on Sunday. I'd miss the boat if I did."

Would she were gone already! August probably thought to himself. Ay, for until she had left town, it would be impossible for him, without feeling ashamed, to go and pick up a certain bank-book. But still——

"What's your hurry!" he exclaimed. "Can't you wait over for the next ship north? You've no one at home calling for you."

She paid small heed to the words he spoke—his conversation was so much thin air. "Ay, so now you must have my many thanks," she said, getting into her coat. "I'll never forget this treat I've had, stranger that I am

here in town and all that. For I may as well say it's almost like paradise being here. Do you know when I came off the boat last night I met the druggist here on the pier and I never saw him before in my life but he wanted to carry my basket for me! I can't get over that!"

"Ay, that druggist, he's a top-notch fellow. I know him well."

"And the same with the manager of the hotel, you can't imagine how nice he was to me. When I asked him how much he wanted for the room I was to have, he said it wasn't big enough to charge for. But I didn't want it that way, for he mustn't think it's charity I'm needing. But it only goes to show how kind folk here in Segelfoss are to me. And now I'm mindful to know what time it says on that watch of yours, that is, if it's going at all?"

"Going! When I have so many folk under me here, I have to keep time by the minute!" He takes down his watch from the wall and gives her the time.

"So now I must go," she says, "for I wrote to the judge there I'd stop in to see him before noon. . . . That Ane Maria as was wife to that Karolus, I suppose you remember her well? She's old now and her days have been many and long, but a sight it is to see how active and full of fun she still is. And that must be because she's never been sick—ay, both she and I, we're never sick a day, and that's how we manage to keep up without growing old, but it was odd, just the same, how you knew me the minute I stepped into the room here."

"Nothing odd about that," said August, "for you don't look a day older than you did when I last saw you."

"But then there can't be many more of us you still can remember," she said, pausing to think. "And as I say, that factory of yours, there's nothing to be done with that, and I'll explain it all to the judge. Unless a certain Englishman comes to Polden and buys it. Ay, you wouldn't believe it, but one year there came an English-

man and bought him a house in Polden. It was out where the pilots live—you know. He happened to see a board in the outside of the house and he wanted to buy the board because there was some writing on it and other signs on it which proved it had come out of a wreck. But shrewd he was, that pilot, and he didn't want to give up the board. 'All right, then I'll buy the whole house,' said the Englishman, and that he did. And then, excuse me, if he didn't take that one board out of the house and go away with it and leave the house just as it stood. And now there's a family moved in there, and there they live to this day and no one ever hears a word from that Englishman. What do you think, August, would you be ashamed of me if I took another cup of coffee and finished up what's here?"

"Ashamed of you? Say, are you out of your head!"

"My, what coffee! But I won't take another one of these cakes, and that much I'll promise you!"

"Why not? You must have some more cakes, as well!"

"No, for now I've eaten enough. . . . And then there's that sister Hosea and Ezra, that husband of hers—you remember them, too, I suppose? For it was you that laid out the plans for that big barn of theirs, and they all objected and said you were making it too large to take care of what crops could be raised, but it's long ago now that he found it too small for him and twice now he's had to build an addition. And that's all because of that big peat bog he drained and put to rich use as a farm. So now that Hosea and her husband, they're folk both rich and respected and the biggest taxpayers we have. And you'll have me to take them your greetings, I suppose? Ay ay, August, so now I must say good-bye and wish you good fortune with all that money of yours!"

She stepped to the door without offering him her hand.

He realized that it had been the strong coffee which had brought colour into her cheeks and made her unusually talkative. Truth to tell, too, he was bored with hearing

her voice. Whilst she was going on about Ezra and all that he was in that little world of hers up north, he had seemed to recall that it had been he, one August, who had first drained the bog, then arranged for his little helper, Ezra, a bright young lad but a starveling, to acquire the rich lands which resulted. The idea and the initial execution in the matter of draining that bog had been August's. Now why had she not mentioned that? . . . Oh well, Polden and its people were nothing to him. . . . But there now Paulina was leaving, and he could not let her go without a word, some little word of thanks.

"Paulina!" he called. "If it's true as you say I'm to have this money and all, let me tell you one thing right here to your face: I'm simply not going to scratch around up in the mountains and throw good money away on any old kind of a mine, for no one could ever get me to do a thing like that here in this life, for I've seen enough of them down in South America and other places in the world where they go around chipping out stones and looking at them through a magnifying glass and all that, and where they spent their last penny on a license to work out their claims and suchlike, for many's the time I could see where things would end for them, but they had the gold fever and they couldn't stop. Ay, God preserve me from nonsense like that. So, you can feel as safe as you like about that, Paulina——"

"That's none of my business," she said, brushing the air aside with the flat of her hand. "What do you think I care about that? It's nothing to me what you do."

. . . An hour filled with plans and with grandeur, journeys through the clouds, scenes and glorious adventure. . . .

Well it was, then, that Gammelmoderen came to his room and put an end to all his dreaming. She had come, as usual, to seek his advice on a certain matter, this time

in regard to the widow Solmund's shameful attitude toward her noble benefactor, the druggist. It had something to do with fifty *kroner*, or possibly half that amount. August's feelings of annoyance grew apace as the shocking tale was unfolded. See, they came to him about everything! Well, he had nothing against that, he was flattered. Nor was he lacking in the ability to solve their every problem. And tomorrow, if not already today, his power would consist not of good will alone—no, he would have the pressure of wealth at his back.

"She won't give him any peace, did you say?"

"Not a single moment of peace! She keeps coming to the drugstore and stays there till the apprentice carries her out."

"Very well, then she'll hear from me!" said August, and surely that came straight from the shoulder.

"I knew it!" exclaimed Gammelmoderen. "I knew that if only I could come to you——!"

"I won't stand for it!" he shrilled, just as though he were sincerely indignant, as though no one could be found who was powerful enough to prevent him from stepping in. Then, in a voice which was milder by far, he said: "It's a shame to bother you, but I can't make out what they've done with those clothes of mine. You see, I'd like to get up!"

"You shall have your clothes before another hour goes by," said Gammelmoderen. "Thanks, Altmulig! Oh, such a one as you are! . . ."

The next hour was filled with intense activity. His first move was to inspect the new road. Everything fine about that, a veritable highway all the way up to the summit where the hunting lodge stood looking at him from beneath its arching eyebrows.

He dismissed the remaining workmen. What about the ironwork? they asked. Later! he replied. Other things to do first!

They walked down the road together. The workmen were to begin work on Herr Buttonhead's cellar, whilst August would have to go all the way into town to strike the road leading to North Parish where the widow Solmund lived. . . . Oh, but then, what an unfortunate encounter! At a street corner he meets none other than Paulina, whose keen eyes it is quite impossible for him to avoid.

She reveals no signs of amazement at seeing him up and about, and immediately launches into conversation: "It's good that I met you here, August! For now I've been out to see the judge and I've delivered all the papers to him and got my receipt and all that. So now all you have to do is to go to him and get that bank-book of yours. A remarkable man, the judge—"If you please, won't you sit down!" he said to me, and then he sat down himself and listened to everything I had to say. By deed of assignment, it was doubtless my money, he said. Ay, but I was of no mind to hold on to someone else's money, I answered. And that made the judge laugh. And when I was going out the door, he said I would have to come to his home this evening and have a chat with him and his wife. And now I've never heard of such lovely people as those that live here in Segelfoss! And do you know what happened to me when I left your place today? It seems that the doctor and that Esther had heard about me from the druggist, so what did they do but go right to the hotel and leave an important message for me to come out to their place at once—hahaha!—and if I didn't come there by myself they'd get me there by force! Did you ever hear of such people as live down here! So now I haven't time to talk any more with you, for I must hurry back to the hotel and tidy myself up a mite before I go out to the doctor's. But I'll have to tell you one thing, August, I'm certainly not sorry you made me come all this way down here to Segelfoss and I'll never forget my visit here. So now you must

go to the judge at once and get what really belongs to you."

She hastened off. August had been unable to get in a single word.

He glanced at his watch. . . . Paulina was right, he could go to the judge at once. . . . Heavens, what a fortunate encounter!

It took him ten minutes to reach his destination and another ten minutes to talk with the judge. He thanked the good gentleman for his splendid help in this matter, in his own choice words, offered his blessings and departed.

He barely glanced at the unexpectedly large balance revealed by the bank-book—good Lord in Heaven!—then consulted his watch again and hastily made for the bank.

Inside stood Consul Gordon Tidemand and Banker Davidsen ready to close for the day. The Consul was already drawing on those yellow gloves of his.

August begged pardon and somewhat shyly held forth his bank-book. Would he be able to draw out a bit of money? he asked. He had one thing or another to pay for—mere trifles, however. . . .

The two gentlemen fell to studying the book. All summer long they had been hearing about this fortune of August's, and now they were making the discovery that the matter had been no myth. They nodded and said there was nothing to prevent them from paying out money against *such* a book—how much would he like?

August asked for a mere thousand—so he could have a bit of pocket money by him, he said.

Outside the bank, the Consul said: "Jump in, Altmulig. We'll drive home together."

August: "Thanks, but I—you see, I have business up in North Parish——"

"Fine, then I'll drive you out to North Parish first," said the Consul. "You've just got up out of bed and you mustn't overtax your strength. It's a pleasure

to spare you the walk. Has your illness been anything serious?"

"No, just a cold."

They mentioned the road. It was finished now. Only the ironwork left to be set up and there was no particular hurry about that. The Consul would drive his ladies and the children up the new road to the lodge this very afternoon.

They found where the widow Solmund lived. August spent but a few decisive minutes within; his words were brief and to the point, for he was now a man of position. He threw a fifty *kroner* note on the table under her nose. If you please! Keep your mouth shut from now on! Finished!

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THAT same afternoon August is on his way to South Parish. It is merely an ordinary day of the week—a Friday, to be exact—but such a day will do, much may be accomplished on a Friday, good as well as evil. . . .

He might have gone to the store in Segelfoss and purchased a new complete outfit, and he had given this matter some thought; however, he was not sufficiently calm in his mind for this—his heart was bidding him to hasten. And was this so strange? Had anything so remarkable never happened to another?

He might have appeared in a new suit of clothes, perfume on his handkerchief, his shirt open at the throat; he might have borrowed Frøken Marna's saddle-horse and gone posting down to South Parish like a very country squire, and to this matter he had also given some thought, but his heart would not grant him a moment. What, was he out of his mind, then? Couldn't he keep himself under control? Ay, he was well enough under control. There was nothing mean or demolished about his appearance as it was. A sailor lad on shore-leave again; his gait was light, he had money in his pocket, he was in love.

There was no need for him to go scuffing up the dust of a country road, pausing every now and then to wipe the dust from his shoes in the heather which grew by the way; he might have had a boy, a body servant to follow at his heels and wipe his shoes clean with a handkerchief of pure silk. Might he not also at this moment have forgotten Cornelia in South Parish completely, and instead, with a ticket in his pocket, stepped out into the wide world which beckoned to him with loving arms? He had thought of such a thing, too, but there was his heart, his heart.

The family is out in the field, all hands at work with the haying, raking it up and dragging it into the barn, loading it onto a flat sledge, and hauling it home in old Norse style. August walks simply and politely over to them and is modest in every gesture, despite his untold wealth. He touches his hat and, in old Norse style, says: "Bless the work!"

Tobias thanks him, spits, and is ready for a good old-fashioned chat.

"You're not to stop your work for my sake," says August.

"This is the last load for today," answers Tobias. "I'm afraid to take in any more. It isn't so dry."

August thrusts his hand into the load and feels about.

"What are you doing that for?" asks Tobias.

"Are you salting it?"

"Just a wee bit."

Cornelia and her mother and all the little ones come up; they are finished with cocking the hay. August touches his hat to them, but his old cheeks are flaming and it is with difficulty he manages to say: "Fine weather for hay we're having!"

"Ay, that it is!" Cornelia replies.

She immediately begins walking in the direction of the house, the others trailing behind her. On the way in, August observes that every now and then the horse, of its own accord, halts to rest, though the load it is dragging is surely light. Immediately upon halting, it lowers its muzzle to the ground and begins gnawing the stubble, meanwhile glaring in every direction.

"What ails that mare of yours?" asks August. "Do you let her do whatever she wants?"

"I have to take it easy with her," replies Tobias. "Cornelia's the only one who can handle her."

"Does she bite?"

"Bites and kicks."

Cornelia is called to unhitch the horse and put it out to tether. In the meantime, Tobias unloads the hay, carries it armful by armful into the barn and at length bends to pick up every last stray wisp from the sledge, lest any part of the crop be wasted. At length he salts down the hay in the barn.

His wife and her little ones have gone into the house.

August follows Cornelia with his eyes; she must protect herself from the horse whilst leading it, must hold tight to the bridle to prevent the beast from snapping at her, must continue to hold the bridle with one hand whilst tethering the horse by the foot with the other. At length she slips off the bridle and skips gingerly to one side. The horse immediately lays back its ears, scowls and turns its back to her.

Cornelia returns uninjured. She is barefoot and thinly clad, but she is handsome and agile in her movements, a perfect portrait of youth.

"How do you get hold of her when you want to harness her up?" asks August.

"With a handful of hay," she replies.

Such is life day by day on this little farm of theirs. And it is not the worst life imaginable, either. Folk live and grow up and die here, the same as everywhere else. The sky is blue here, just as it is over all the earth. Cornelia is accustomed to such a life, and she is accustomed to no other.

But August pities her in his heart.

They went into the house. Cornelia's mother was already busy at the spinning wheel. A window stood open, for the evening was warm.

"I'm thinking about that horse," said August. "She must be a nuisance to have."

"Ay, she's getting worse instead of better," said Tobias.

"She isn't so bad," said Cornelia. "I've grown used to her ways."

"I hear she both bites and kicks," said August. "And certainly that's no way for a horse to act."

"It's worse with our other creatures," Cornelia continued.

"How's that, are they sick?" asked August.

"No, but they have no food to eat."

Cornelia knows all there is to know about that little farm of theirs and she has a care for the whole. Well, but how could anything escape her? For here she was born and here she has grown up and this is her world and her life. "There's nothing for them to eat in the pasture," she says. "And that's because of the sheep."

"Ay," says her father. "It's all because of the sheep."

"For the sheep, they gnaw right down to the soil itself and there's nothing left for the cattle. I could cry over it. Soon we won't be getting a drop of milk from a single one of our cows."

August hears this and August has a keen old head on his shoulders. "Hm!" he says and is prepared to say more. . . .

"No, that's so," replies Tobias, his own head as empty as ever. "There's no forage for the cows in the pasture any more."

August is no longer able to hold himself in. "Well, why don't you send those sheep of yours up the mountain where it's green?" he suggests.

At which Tobias merely smiles a wan smile. "No," he says. "I know of no one else who is doing that. So we'll have to keep the flock down here."

"How many sheep in your flock?" asks August.

Cornelia counts up both sheep and lambs. "Eight," she reports.

"Do you want to sell them?"

"Sell them?" Tobias asks. "What's that? Do we want to sell them?"

"I'll buy that flock of yours," says August. "I'll keep them up in the mountains."

Cornelia smiles with a wet mouth; she almost drools with amazement. Her mother halts the spinning wheel and looks from one face to another. "Why, we can't sell our sheep," she says. "For then we'd have no wool."

"You can have back the wool," says August.

More speechless amazement.

"Ay, you can have all the wool back. But you'll have to feed the sheep over the winter from October to May when I bring them down from the mountain. I'll pay you for the winter's feeding."

Heavens, what dealing in sheep! Much sharp thinking there in the room. At length Tobias comes out with a weighty decision. "That depends upon what you're to give, doesn't it?" he asks.

August is on the point of answering: "No, that depends upon how much you will take." However, he catches himself in time and says: "Let me hear your price. I know my own."

Tobias thought for a long time, cast eyes in the direction of his wife, cast eyes in the direction of Cornelia and at length made mention of a price. Possibly this was not what might be termed a religious price, a price guided by Scriptural reference, but as a matter of fact, the evangelist had now left town and the baptisms below the falls were now nought but a matter of history. And how truly difficult it was for Tobias to decide on a price which was bloody enough to suit him and one which would at the same time sound reasonable to this Baptist brother of his! "Say twenty-six or -seven *kroner*—what do you say to that?" asked Tobias. "I don't remember what the price was last year or the years before that."

August merely nodded his head. He was such a mighty figure, no limit to the things he could command—hey

there, a skipper at last! However, he must not allow the affair to slip through his fingers without a touch of impressive pomp and ceremony. "I say, Cornelia, I suppose you have ink and pen and a bit of paper about?" he asked, as though he were about to take title to an ocean or two.

He sat down to write and it was silly to attempt to engage him in conversation while he was writing, for he refused to answer a word.

The room was dark with doubt. What was the man up to? What was he writing for? Was he thinking of buying on credit . . . ?

Oh, they were such simple-minded souls, they had never seen a magnate or a president in action before. They did not know, as he, how the important business of the world was transacted. Nor, in truth, did they realize that he was making out a little contract with Tobias so that no one could ever say he had made the family a gift.

August wrote until he was finished and then he said: "Now, Tobias, if you will be good enough to sign this document, you may have your money!"

A bomb! Tobias could merely stammer humbly that he was no great hand at writing. However, he did manage to scribble down his name. "If only you can make that out!" he says.

August hauls out his wallet—not until this moment has he made a single move in the direction of that wallet of his. And as a wallet, it was a miracle and one of the seven wonders of the world! It was stuffed full and literally bursting with bills of large denomination. A flurry of excitement there in the room now. August takes stock of the effect, notices that Cornelia has audibly caught her breath—"Ah!" she said. And there in the window peers a face, the face of a certain lad.

August lays three hundred-*kroner* bills on the table.

Tobias, utterly at a loss, fumbles about his clothes, goes

through all his empty pockets and—— “I can’t give back change on anything as big as that,” he says.

August waves the suggestion aside with a toss of the head. “That suits me quite all right. I’ll owe you something for winter feeding.”

The face in the window disappeared and in a moment the lad Hendrik entered the room. “Don’t mind me!” he said.

The family was deeply vexed at his arrival. Tobias immediately hid the bills which lay on the table. No, no one ought to sell sheep in front of an open window, for there came Hendrik now butting in on things, even though he was baptised and really ought to know better. Wonder what business he had inside? Cornelia must have felt like showing him the door, so deeply was she annoyed by his presence. For Hendrik was by no means her sweetheart at this particular time.

Poor Hendrik, he must have observed the enmity expressed on every hand, but he was courageous enough to utter a question. “How many loads of hay did you get in today?” he asked.

No one answered him. Cornelia retired into her own room and her mother resumed her spinning.

“We only got in four loads up at our place,” he said to keep from collapsing with sheer embarrassment.

It was August who came to his rescue; he did not feel they had treated the boy kindly. And what if he had stood there in the window and seen that pocketbook of his? It was an object worth seeing. Furthermore, Cornelia might have sat there and uttered a few more gasps of amazement, instead of indifferently walking off to her room. He made sure that her door stood open, then turned to Hendrik and asked: “How many sheep in the flock up at your place?”

“Sheep?” Hendrik counted them up. “Oh, there might be ten or twelve. Are you buying sheep?”

"Yes," said August. "I'm buying sheep."

This gave Hendrik something to think about. "Well, we'd certainly like to sell. How much are you giving?"

"I'm paying seven-and-twenty *kroner* per head for sheep, lambs and wethers," August notified him.

Hendrik nearly jumped out of his skin; never before in his life had he heard of such an autumn price for sheep. It looked like the hand of Providence, like a gift from on high. "Will you be kind enough to wait while I run home and get my father?" he asked.

August nodded.

And there came Cornelia out of her room. She was followed by her brother. "Hurry up now, Mattis!" she said and pushed him out through the front door.

"What's this? Where's he going?" asked her mother.

"He's going on an errand to North Parish for me. You know," said Cornelia.

"An errand about what?"

Signs of great suffering dwelt in the lines of Tobias' face and his wife halted her spinning wheel to peer at him uneasily. What, couldn't this little stroke of business of his be transacted without others also benefiting by it and coming in on the same bloody price for sheep? Fie, on such luck as he had!

"What are you thinking of?" asked Tobias bitterly. "Are you giving twenty-seven *kroner* to every Tom, Dick and Harry you meet?"

"That is my price today," answered August.

Oh, how glorious it felt to be a magnate again, to hold human destinies in the hollow of his hand! He had not thought of buying up sheep, the devil and all if he had! Sheep were neither a silver mine nor a herd of hundreds of thousands of steers! Couldn't be mentioned in the same breath! But as neither a pleasure yacht nor a ranch in Bolivia had been offered for sale here and now, he had been forced to content himself with a simple transaction in sheep.

But he was August, wasn't he? And there he was, his mind immediately ablaze with all manner of plans and ideas. He would, out of common civility, have a talk with Consul Gordon Tidemand and, in any event, secure his permission to use the mountain pasture lands for his sheep, and after that he would buy up sheep all over the countryside. They would be as fat as butter by fall, and he would get Jørn Mathildesen and his wife to shepherd the flocks. He would not slaughter when autumn came; instead, he would breed them, breed them year after year—why, there was forage for at least ten thousand sheep back up there in the mountains! In time he would build huge shelters for his flocks and buy up six or seven miles of moorland on which to raise winter fodder. Paulina surely could have no objections to an enterprise of such a nature—she was fond of animals, she had creatures of her own. Oh Lord, what wouldn't he have in the way of sheep and wool and mutton . . .

Look, there come Hendrik and his father down the road at a run! Tobias and his wife are obliged to laugh sarcastically at their haste and even Cornelia feels called upon to indulge in a witticism. "They're running for their lives!" she remarks. Yes, an unusually clever girl in many ways, she was, that Cornelia.

Hendrik and his father stand puffing for breath in the room and, out of common decency, Tobias is compelled to say to his neighbour: "Take and sit down, why don't you!"

"No, I don't want to sit down. Ay, so I suppose you got in all your hay, Tobias——?"

August interrupted at once. "How many sheep have you got to sell?"

This was coming at the man a mite too abruptly. A man of the old school, it was his way to begin things with a bit of a cosy chat. "Ay, so they tell me you're buying up sheep," he says. "And now I hear that——"

"How many sheep do you want to sell?"

"Twelve, big and little," said the man, with a respectful bow.

August to Cornelia: "Have you a little more paper?"

"No," she replied. "Things are so slow with us, we haven't any more."

"Hm!" said August. "I say, Hendrik, you might run into town after all those books and ledgers of mine."

Hendrik, ready on the instant.

"But you'd never be able to find them!"—August hauled a ring containing eight large keys from his trousers pocket. "No," he said, "you'd never be able to find them in all those trunks and safes of mine."

"My, such a lot of keys!" exclaimed the boy.

August: "But, as a matter of fact, I never travel with more than four at a time, for I don't want to seem to exaggerate."

Cornelia might possibly enjoy hearing the number of his safe combination?

He solved the problem of paper by writing on the back of Tobias' contract: same price, same terms covering the winter feeding from October to May, figures such and such. Sign here! Here's your money! Finished! Not a single superfluous word.

The man appeared to be somewhat embarrassed. "Am I to have all that?" he asked. "No, that can't really be your meaning?"

August replied that if he had paid him too much, the difference could be applied against his bill for winter feeding. Unfortunately, he had brought no small change with him. "And now, Cornelia," he said, "I'd like you to come out with me and have a look at the horse. I'd like to examine it."

Too bad how things went; he had sought this little moment alone with her right there in the full hearing of four pairs of ears. Instead of taking the hint, the entire household and the neighbour lad and his father banded themselves together into a body and followed the pair out

of the house. In vain he kept stalling for time; round and round the mare he walked, carefully scrutinizing the creature's dung and several times succeeded in getting her to stand on two legs, but that Satan's own gallery of people, though they must have been decidedly hungry after a long day of arduous toil, they refused to budge from the spot.

August was at length forced to conclude his examination. "It occurred to me that she might have had tetheritis and colic," he said. "And if so, I could have got rid of it for her in a very few minutes."

The neighbour man was more than willing to look up to this wealthy gentleman. "Oh, could you so?" he asked. "Ay, that's what it means to be one who is something, right up on things and all that!"

"It would be simply a question of stabbing her," said August.

"But it certainly isn't wind that ails her," said Cornelia.

"No, that's just what I say," August answered.

"And I don't know what else can ail her except that she's shy and ferocious."

"Well, isn't that enough!"

All laughed and the neighbour man agreed that what August had said was true, so true. For really wasn't it enough that a horse should be shy and ferocious? Why, there was a thing he'd insist upon until he laid him down and died!

August consulted his watch. "It's getting on toward evening," he said. "I'll examine the horse more thoroughly the next time, Cornelia. Today I haven't the time."

But just as they were returning to the house a cyclist turned into the yard with Mattis sitting on behind. It was Benjamin from North Parish, dripping wet with sweat. Cornelia immediately went into the house.

"Is that you so far from home!" said Tobias.

"That's how it looks," said Benjamin.

Now Benjamin had acquired no wealth direct from the underworld folk, but he had earned so blessed much money during the summer that he had been able to buy himself a bicycle and other things besides. And in this he was well ahead of the lad Hendrik, who had neither a bicycle nor any immediate likelihood of acquiring one.

Benjamin nodded familiarly to August and even offered to shake hands with him. But August the garage-builder and August the foreman of road construction was by no means the August who stood there today, so today the proffered hand of such a mere nonentity was thoroughly ignored.

All stepped into the house.

"I hear you're buying sheep?" asked Benjamin.

"That happens to be my office and my profession," answered August.

"Well, my father has sheep he'd like to sell you."

"Very well, then let your father come to me."

"Ay—but he just asked me to see you for him."

"Have you a power of attorney in writing?" asked August.

"Not in writing, I don't, but——"

"It's that Benjamin who's to have the farm and all that," explained Tobias.

"Good for him," said August, tersely.

He was terse for the very good reason that he had been cheated out of his little *tête-à-tête* with Cornelia, and he was terse because the day was drawing to a close and he felt both hungry and tired out but, above all, because Cornelia had just appeared in the door of her room a bit cleaner than she had been before and with a silver heart on a chain about her neck.

"Oh, so we can't do business together, then?" asked Benjamin, pleasantly.

"No," said August, glancing again at his watch.

"You aren't going to play favourites, are you?" asked Cornelia from the bedroom door. That devil of a Cornelia, if she didn't know what she was about!

"You can't tell what I'll do," answered August. "Seven-and-twenty *kroner* is my price today, but when I've looked over the prices abroad and read all the telegrams back home waiting for me, it may be that tomorrow I'll be offering only twenty."

"No," said Cornelia, stepping up close to him. "No, you certainly won't make a difference between that Benjamin and that Hendrik, I'm sure you won't do that!"

And here perhaps, in spite of everything, he might have given in, for again her eyes were large with pleading, and that silver heart on a chain, it was really no better than trash and certainly not a heart of gold—— He might have said: "Good, I'll take those sheep of yours, Benjamin. How many are there?" But the truth was, he lacked sufficient money, and were he to ask for one day's credit no one would believe him rich. For more than eight head he could not have paid in cash and it might be that Benjamin had twelve.

He glanced at his watch again, rose to his feet and said: "I have an important meeting!" Then, turning to Benjamin, he continued: "Come with that father of yours to my residence there in the Consul's house tomorrow morning at eleven o'clock! How many sheep have you got to sell?"

"Seven."

He was saved. He sat down again, but his mood was peevish and he spat out the words: "Seven sheep! It's hardly worth bothering your father about a number as small as that! I've seen as many as thirty thousand sheep in one flock, and here you come pestering folk with talk about a mere seven! Furthermore, I have a very important meeting. And we haven't any more paper for a contract, either."

Cornelia came with paper. "Here! I just found we had exactly one sheet left!" she said.

A devil of a young one, that Cornelia, worth her weight in gold to any one who had her!

Whilst August sat there writing, the others were simply not to jabber amongst themselves about their haying operations; he promptly shut them up by saying: "Look here, do you want me to write up this document or don't you?"

Two hundred-*kroner* bills made their appearance.

"Haven't we coffee for those as come to visit us?" asked Tobias.

"Ay, but we've only brown sugar," said his wife.

August rose, tore his watch from his pocket for the tenth time, said good-night and left. It was Tobias who followed him out—no one else, not even Cornelia. August thought that she might at least have seen him to the door!

"There was something I wanted to talk to you about," said Tobias. "I wonder if you'd be good enough to take a look in here in the shed?"

August poked his head into the shed and asked: "Well, what is there for me to see in here?"

"That skin rug hanging over there! I was wondering if you'd like to buy it?"

"No," said August.

"No, I suppose that's too much to expect. But it's a good rug and the last one to lie down under it was that evangelist who baptised you. You'd be able to sell it to some one else right off."

August shook his head.

"You're buying up sheep, so I thought that you could buy an extra fine skin rug from me. But that's too much to expect. And so I don't suppose you have need for a single thing that I own, for I've hardly a thing to my name. I'm so badly off I don't know what to do. And then when the widow Solmund was to get help from a cinema

show, what they call it, and when they came to my house here and told me to buy tickets to help her, there were three *kroner* thrown away. And then there are always so many expenses——”

August looked at his watch.

“No, I don’t want to hold you back,” said Tobias, “and it’s a pity and all to be asking you straight out, but that neighbour of mine, here he gets four hundred *kroner* out of you and all I got was three. And it’s not that I envy him for that——”

“He had four sheep more than you.”

“Ay, but excuse me, if he didn’t get a whole hundred more than I got! And all the time it was me he could thank for it, for it was me you came to first. And so I was thinking if I could get the money for the winter feeding——”

“No,” said August, starting for home.

“Well— No no, it’s too much to expect,” admitted Tobias and kept pace with him. “It’s altogether too much to expect. But if as you’d lend me a helping hand and save me from going under, I’d give you a document on this house of mine what they call a mortgage. What do you say to that?”

August suddenly asked: “What did that Cornelia send a message to that Benjamin for?”

“What? Benjamin? How so?”

“She sent out her brother to get him.”

“Ay,” said Tobias. “Now what ever did she do that for! Forgive me my sins, but if there isn’t something up between her and that lad Benjamin! There he’s just given her an ornament to hang around her neck and he’s a fine and prosperous man for her to have and that’s as clear as day. He’s to have what his father leaves, so it won’t be for Cornelia to worry about anything here in this life. Ay, you heard it with your own ears, they only sold seven sheep, so that leaves them at least two ewes with

their lambs and a ram to keep for breeding, so it's terrible how much they own of everything there is to have. No, you don't have to worry about that Cornelia, if that's what you meant, for she'll be well taken care of, and that you can believe. And now they'll be married the first chance they get, so I've heard."

August looked at his watch.

"Ay, so what do you say to that business I asked you about? Brand-new house with doors and windows and everything else you can think of."

"I don't want that house of yours," said August.

"I'm so up against it," said Tobias. "And if only you could let me have a few miserable *kroner*——"

"Go see that son-in-law of yours, that Benjamin, if he's all the fellow you say!" said August, to end all talk. And thus had he handled himself like a man, like a true captain. . . .

Now that he had become a person of wealth and importance, now that he could cut a glamorous figure, it seemed that Cornelia would be lost. Lost—wholly lost? That all depended. They had yet to see him in all his glory. It would be a triumph for him to show them a thing or two about wholesale trading in sheep, about the meaning of financial omnipotence. He now had twenty-seven head; on the morrow Jørn Mathildesen would gather them together and drive them up in the mountains. August had heard the legend about one whose name was Coldevin and later another whose name was Willatz Holmsen, both of whom had maintained flocks at graze in the mountains. Here was no idle dream, no wild caprice to bring smiles to the faces of folk; on the contrary here was a mighty enterprise in the making—he would buy a thousand animals to begin with, perhaps he would even open an office in town. . . .

Suddenly, as he was rounding a sharp curve in the road, he found Aase standing there in his path. Now August

before and August today were not one and the same person and it was his thought to stalk straight past her without offering a word of greeting.

"Well," said she. "I see you've put on some airs!"

August kept on walking.

"You've been out to her place again, I see."

At this August turned and said: "What's that to you?"

"Nothing. But remember I've warned you."

"You and your warnings! What do you think I care about that!"

"Just you wait and see!" cried Aase. "A Friday child and dung is all you are!"

"Say, what the devil do you mean by standing there in the middle of the road calling people names!" exclaimed August and took a couple of steps in her direction. "I'm man enough to see that you're arrested any day I like."

"Hahaha!" laughed Aase. But here was no true laughter; she did not laugh, she merely uttered the syllables.

At length August continued: "I've heard a number of things about you, you monster. You go around spitting bad luck on folks' doorsteps, you scared a man's horse so that both got drowned in the river and you scratched out one of the doctor's eyes. But it's not me that's afraid of you, and when the proper time for it comes, I'll turn you over to the authorities and see that you're put behind bars. Mark my words!"

So much for Aase.

He straightened his back there on the road, made himself tall and bold. Benjamin, with no more than seven sheep, had actually bested him—it was laughable, downright idiotic! Well, they didn't know him yet, they thought he was buying skin rugs, whereas he was really in the market for ten thousand sheep. . . .

He hummed to himself as he walked along; inwardly he sang a great song—by their leave, they would have to find out about him, those creatures who crept on the earth!

Coming to the first tiny huts by the sea, a great wave of tender pity swept over him. He was so rich and powerful; he could leave nine hundred *kroner* behind him in Tobias' house, he could fling fifty in the face of the widow Solmund, but what could others do! Here before him stood a cluster of tiny dwellings, all that were left of the old Segelfoss, and within these walls stark poverty surely stalked. Such a shy and miserable little community of human beings lived here; each time before, as he had approached this section of town, he had seen these primitive creatures sneak indoors where they hovered until he had passed.

Some children were playing out in the road and were too intent upon their game to notice his approach. Outside one of the houses stood a bare-headed man chopping a boxful of wood; he observed August too late to make an effective escape. August handed a ten-*kroner* bill to the eldest of the little girls and told her to share it equally with the others. But there she stood without moving, the money clutched in her hand.

"Bless the work!" August said, turning to the man.

The man fumbled about with his hair as though trying to take off his hat, although he was quite bare-headed.

"Ay, thanks!" he says.

"Is this your little girl?"

"No."

The man had light blue eyes, the colour of milk and water, and his face was old and withered. He was fairly well dressed, however.

"Are you a fisherman?" asked August.

"No," said the man.

"What are you then?"

"A grave-digger."

"Hm, a grave-digger. Ay, we all of us must die and have a grave!" The devil of a taciturn creature, August

must have thought to himself. What is he made of, I wonder? Then— "Is this your house?" he asked.

"Ay," answered the man. "Such as she is."

"Do you live alone in it?"

"No."

It was like pulling teeth to wring a word out of this clod! August sent the little girl to get small change for his bill and waited. Four other children stood about staring at him.

"Are any of these little ones yours?" he asked.

"No. I haven't any."

"Lost them?"

"Ay, they've left home."

"Hm, left home, eh? So maybe it's only you and the wife left now?"

"Ay."

But when the girl returned with the small change and the children had been given two *kroner* each to run home with, the old grave-digger suddenly remarked of his own accord: "Just as that Willatz Holmsen would have done!"

"You mean he gave away small change?"

"Ay ay ay ay ay! He gave things away!" answered the man, wagging his head, and bringing fond memories to mind.

"Hm, so you belonged here in Willatz Holmsen's time?"

"Ay. And after that I went to work for Herr Holmen-graa in the mill. But then one day the mill shut down."

As the moments passed, the man became more communicative; he was no clod, he was merely cowed and broken. And August received an explanation from him which was well worth the ten *kroner* it had cost him to pause for a chat—he learned the solution of a riddle which had long troubled his mind.

"Ay, I knew him well, the late Holmsen," said the man, "and he had an only son. I was here the whole time and I

never left the place. And that Holmengraa, he was also a good man to work for, and he often gave away coppers to children he met. He himself had a son and a daughter, but they were grown up. And after him there was that Theodore."

"The Consul's father?"

"Ay. And a fine man that Theodore was, too. Once he gave me ten *kroner*. Ay ay, but it wasn't exactly a gift, either, for it was me as helped him carry two buckets of young fish up to that big lake up yonder in the mountains."

August pricked up his ears. "The lake? Young fish?"

"Ay, he threw them into the water here and there. It was a Sunday morning, and I mind it well. He was such a speculator, that Theodore, and he had so many good ideas for himself and he even sent south for two buckets of young fish. And when we came down from the mountain, he gave me a ten-*kroner* bill. It was altogether too much, but it was for good luck, he said."

"And did the fish grow up there in the lake?" asked August, feeling his way along.

"That I can't say," answered the grave-digger. "I was not to mention it to anyone, I was told by that Theodore. Ay, those were the days, and those were the folk here in Segelfoss!" the man rambled on. He was old and withered, perhaps sufficiently cowed by life to wish all men well. He had words of particular praise for the Consul: "Oh, a splendid man toward one and all! We don't know him, for he never shows himself in this part of town, but he sends out orders on that store of his whenever he wants to help us——"

Many more children had clustered about and August was annoyed with himself that he lacked enough money for them all. He gave them all he had, thrust his last ten-*kroner* bill into the grave-digger's hand and departed.

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

HE was hardly out of bed the next morning when folk began coming to him from Benjamin's neighbourhood to offer him sheep for sale. But they closed no deals, for fate, it seems, is capricious. August had investigated prices abroad and had learned that, overnight, the price per head for sheep had fallen in Europe, Valparaiso and New York. "I'm paying twenty *kroner* today," he said.

The news brought joy to the hearts of those who had sold the day before, but it embittered those who were seeking to sell today. Twenty *kroner*, they said; that wasn't much more than they were accustomed to getting in the autumn.

"You've heard my price," said August.

Then perhaps they'd better wait, they said.

"Go ahead and wait! But then your sheep will clean out the pastures and your cows will give no milk."

He went to the bank, supplied himself with some real money, and asked the Consul if he might use the latter's mountain grazing lands on which to pasture his sheep. The Consul immediately granted him permission, adding: "I don't know how much of the mountain belongs to me. However, it's a real service you are performing in thus finding something to eat for the animals."

Banker Davidsen was listening attentively and at once the editor in him was awakened. "It is a tremendous service!" he said. "May I publish something about it in the paper?"

August: "What does the Herr Consul think about it?"

"What do I think? Why ask me?"

"I was wondering whether you would want your servant

to have his name in the paper?" . . . Heavens, but the man had tact! Where had he acquired this gift?

"Surely I have no objection to offer," the Consul smiled.

August sent for Jørn Mathildesen and his wife and put them to work with the sheep. He himself went to the Segelfoss Store and, as was quite reasonable to suppose, bought himself some new clothes with much red on shirt and belt. At the same time he stopped to buy a cigar, licked it thoroughly to preserve it, and tucked it away in his pocket. With that he made for South Parish again.

Quite humbly a fool? An old idiot in love? Hush, hush, he had business in South Parish, he had so much to discuss! Had it sunk into Cornelia's mind who he was, what kind of business he had transacted the day before, his great achievement in sheep, the record price he had paid? Where was his like to be found? Wouldn't she be obliged to compare him with the more mighty men of history, with Goliath, for example?

Coming within sight of the farm, he paused to light his cigar. It was still moist and would last a good long time. He unbuttoned his coat and turned into the yard. He saw no one about, and surely he was not such a one as would peer in through windows at folk. Instead, he lightly tapped the calf of his leg with his walking stick. As the lining of his coat was of pure silk it was important that he should stand facing the wind; thus, too, would his overstuffed wallet be visible as it protruded from his inside pocket. An old man suddenly become a youth again—he would show off with what he had and disparage whatever he lacked.

What were those people doing inside? Even if they happened to be sitting there eating, they really ought to pause long enough to come to the door and receive him. Well, he would show them—he would stroll right in on them!

The entire family were seated at table. "Bless the food!" he said, offended. Cornelia got up immediately and offered him her chair. Ay, that was the least she could do! Tobias, on the other hand, was somewhat reserved, possibly still resentful over his failure to sell a certain skin rug to August.

"Well, you've had a chance to sleep on that sheep business," said August, "and I'm mindful to know what you think about it today?"

"Ay," said Tobias. "Ay."

His wife's reply was equally brilliant.

"You ought to be glad you sold them yesterday."

"Hm?"

"Because today my price is twenty *kroner*."

"Why why why why!"

"And tomorrow it may be that I'll only be offering eighteen."

"Now what can be the reason for that?" asked Tobias.

August sat there swaying his head back and forth for a time. "Tremendous fall in sheep prices all over the world," he said at length.

"That's funny!"

"Australia is stuffing the market with her annual output of lambs."

"Well, then perhaps you'll not be buying any more flocks?" Cornelia asked suddenly.

August merely smiled. "So that's what you think, is it, Cornelia? Oh yes, I'm still in the market! It'll take more than that to stop me! I'm out to buy ten thousand head to begin with."

Cornelia did not clasp her hands over her breast and breathe, "Heavens!" Instead, she sat down. It was possible she couldn't understand it, it was possible that her mind was unable to grasp such large figures.

"I'm mindful to show you something," said August, drawing forth his wallet. "A few telegrams from my

agents in Asia and America!" But in order to find the telegrams it was first necessary for him to fumble through all those many bills which were stuffing two compartments.

"God—is that money?" she gasped.

"Thousand-*kroner* bills," he said indifferently. "Perhaps you've never seen a thousander before? Look here, how large it is! Read it for yourself, the writing's all Norwegian."

The entire family gathered about to stare at the bill. "One thousand" in figures and spelled out. "One thousand" on one side and "one thousand" on the other. The figure "1000" running up and down and across and stuck into every possible corner.

"Oh yes, here they are!" he said and pulled out several papers which looked very much like lottery tickets. "Look here, for they are hourly reports. Yesterday morning at ten o'clock the price of sheep in Jerusalem fell to 16,512 and that means just a trifle under sixteen *kroner* in the money of Pilate and Caiphas. You'd see that for yourself, only you can't be expected to read a foreign language. I could teach you how to do it, though, Cornelia, if you'd like me to," he said wistfully.

"No, what good would that do me?" asked Cornelia.

How silly of him to be so shamelessly in love! Whenever she came near him with her hand, his heart would lie sweet in his breast and his overhanging mustache would quiver. Had he been able to see himself in a mirror he would certainly have taken a grip on himself, but there was no glass there in the room. He got worse and worse; he persisted in boasting and making a caricature of himself. Then suddenly he came down to particulars and seized her hand. His intention had been splendid enough, for it had been his thought to place in that hand a large bank-note and close the fingers tightly about it—such a thin little hand, under-nourished because of the ill fare the house afforded and, the fingers all rough and torn about the nails from hard work.

"What's this!" she asked angrily and hastily withdrew her hand.

"No, what is it!" he echoed and was so up against it to know what to do that he giggled. And again, at this point, had he seen himself in a glass, he would surely have pulled himself together, for his mustache was trembling and the corners of his mouth had grown moist.

"Did I burn your hand?" he managed to ask.

But to this she did not reply.

"Too bad if I burned you!" he said.

"I can't make out what you want of me," she said.

"I can't either," he replied curtly, and at length took a grip on himself. He gathered up his money and his lottery tickets and returned his wallet to his pocket. Bright shiny silk lined his coat, rustled when it moved; the pocket was embroidered with a scrollwork design—hm, wonder if she had taken note of this finery. What did she think it was? Cotton?

"Say, are you made of money!" exclaimed Tobias.

"What's that?" returned August. "No, I'm not exactly made of money. No one can say that. But if you think for a minute that these few bills are all the money I have in the world, you're making a big mistake. And that much I certainly can say."

But all that he said was so much dust and wind for Cornelia. He might have brought in the word "million," but she would merely take it that he was referring to the numerous sands of the seashore, as it said in the Bible.

She retired into her room.

Over in one corner her brother, that clever little Mattis, sat fingering an old accordion.

August, in his younger days, had been something of a master on the accordion and an artist at singing songs to his own accompaniment. But that had been so many years ago, perhaps forty years ago, and his voice was old now and his fingers had grown stiff. "Let me see that thing!" he said.

That old music man, that old connoisseur of accordions, he let his fingers roam about on the keys, familiarized himself with them again after those many years, then paused to think for a moment. No, he could not dash up and down and back and forth with his fingers now as he had in the days of his youth, but he would try a song with a slow and lazy rhythm: "The Girl from Barcelona."

And he got it to go! The devil and all if the miracle of heavenly music wasn't performed right there beneath that humble roof!

Cornelia came hurrying out of her room and halted in front of him with surprise written all over her face. "What, can you play, too!" she exclaimed.

August, superciliously: "On such an instrument as this—hardly! What's your name?" he asked of the boy. "Mattis, eh? Good! Now let me hear what you can do!"

Mattis squirmed and was unable to do anything.

"It's not to be expected of you, either," said August. "On such an old cripple as this! Now listen to me closely, Mattis: if you'll just take and call at the Segelfoss Store tomorrow at exactly twelve o'clock and tell them who sent you, you'll find there'll be a brand-new instrument for you there—a real instrument!" he said.

Mattis stared at him.

"Can't you say your thanks?" demanded Cornelia.

Shyly and happily Mattis gave August his little hand.

"Hm! That's a grand gift for you, Mattis!" said Tobias and left the house. A few moments later his wife followed him outside.

"Come, play a little more!" begged Cornelia.

August, more supercilious than before: "On such an instrument——? Such a thing is for little boys to take apart, but as for me, I only play the piano and the pipe organ these days."

"You can do everything!" she exclaimed.

He realized from her words that she thought more

highly of him now than before, that he had risen in her estimation. Ten thousand sheep and a million *kroner*, these were values too far remote from her own little world, but a well-played ballad—ah, this had reached her heart!

"Ay, Mattis, I don't suppose you'll sleep much tonight, thinking of that wonderful gift you're to get tomorrow," she said.

August: "You yourself can have an even more wonderful gift, if you want, Cornelia."

"Me? No, what do I want of it?"

"Come here and sit on my lap and I'll tell you all about it."

"No," she said crossly.

"Hm? Don't you want to?"

"No."

And with that he came straight out with it: "But when you see me sitting here and offering you everything I own in the world because I want you, Cornelia, what do you say to that?" Courageous words, spoken like a true man!

But Cornelia paled. "What are you thinking of!" she exclaimed. "Are you crazy?"

"No, I'm not crazy," he replied. "I meant what I said."

"You want me for your *wife*?" she cried.

"Is that so downright impossible?"

"Ay, downright impossible," she said. "That can never be!"

Silence.

August became grave and said: "But you ought to see that it would make quite some difference to you, having me for your provider instead of only a little farm lad from the outskirts of town. I can buy you ten farms and dress you up in velvet and jewels so that no one would ever know you from before."

Cornelia: "Ay, but I've no desire for anything more than I have."

"You would never have to work again, you could lie in a bed of eider down both day and night and only get up for your meals. I feel so sorry to see how hard you work, Cornelia. And not only that, here you have to go around hitching and unhitching a ferocious mare."

"She isn't dangerous. It's only that she gets in heat."

"Ay, then you ought to watch out for her," advised August, with grave concern. "And if you come across another horse to take her place, I'll buy that for you, too! You can count on me for that!"

She was on her guard and declined; the mare was good enough.

"All right, but now you must think over my words, Cornelia," he begged, and rose. "It isn't every day in the week that August himself and I come offering our hand in marriage!" In truth, he had no desire to leave her, but, as he discovered himself on his feet, there was nothing for him to do but depart. In the door he turned about with a wounded look on his face, but even this produced no effect.

Outside the house he found both Tobias and his wife staring up at the mountains. August's flocks were plainly visible as small white specks on the green; they hardly seemed to move as they waded about in the lush mountain grass and nibbled and ate their fill. High up on a rock sat the shepherdess Valborg, watching over the flocks.

August was in no mood for a chat, but he glanced up at the sky and remarked that it looked like rain. "So it won't be so many days before there will be forage in the pasture for your cattle," he said.

"And that will be a blessing!" said Tobias' wife.

"We're in the dogdays now and that means rain for these parts, bear in mind what I say. Peace be with you!" he said and strode off.

Tobias fell in step with him. "What do you think about that thing we were talking about yesterday?" he asked.

"What was that?" August shot back without turning his head.

"Whether you'd be willing to help me? A hundred-kroner is nothing for a man like you."

Well, Tobias was surely right in that and, without slackening his pace, August took out his wallet, handed over a red bill, and simply kept on walking, walking. Not another word.

On the way home he encountered Jørn Mathildesen with Benjamin's seven sheep. He was leading one by a rope, the six others trailing on behind. In order to get the leader to go he had fastened a wisp of hay on the rope in front of the creature's face, and mile after mile the sheep went waddling along without once being able to catch up with that wisp of hay. A sheep—gentle and kind but forever idiotic.

"Tomorrow there will be more flocks," said August. "But folk must bring them up the mountain themselves. All you're to do is to stand up there and keep a record of the number you receive."

Jørn nodded and passed on his way. He was unable to stop, for, if he did, the leash in his hand would fall slack and the sheep would catch up with the wisp of hay and promptly gobble it down.

"What did they say at Benjamin's place?" called August.

"They complained about you," Jørn called in reply.

Oh, so they had complained, had they! How sweet of them, especially after they had received sixty or seventy kroner too much for their flock! Well, it had been Cornelia who had brought the plague upon them; she had sent a rush message to that prince of hers, hehe! to that commander of the bicycle brigade! But wait a bit, my dear Benjamin, you have no reason to feel cocksure about that girl of yours, for not even yet has August expanded himself to his full capacity. August is such a man as can

station himself in the middle of a road and, with raised finger, cry: "Stop!" . . . And even worse, there is the lad Hendrik who was probably accepted by the girl not more than two weeks ago and who any day and hour may turn up with his shotgun and his honest taste for murder. . . .

August stopped in at the store, selected the finest and most expensive accordion available for the lad Mattis, bought two cigars and sauntered down to the pier. He would look up the Gypsy Alexander. He had an idea.

The two were not friends—no one was friends with the Gypsy, although he was so capable. He looked up with those piercing eyes of his and asked: "Where the devil have you been keeping yourself?"

"Who wants to know!" August retorted.

"I do, for there have been all kinds of folk trying to get hold of you up at the Manor today, but you've been roaming around like a regular damned old tramp."

"They just came to sell me some sheep," said August. "But here's what I was going to say, Alexander," he added pleasantly—"What do you do during the day?"

"How's that any of your business?" replied the Gypsy, disagreeably.

"For if you're only loafing around and wasting your time, I've a good chance for you to earn some money."

"Hahaha! *You* have?"

"Hold that jaw of yours until I'm through talking!" August commanded him. "You who go around trying to show off how much you know about horses, tell me, do you know the slightest thing better than nothing about sheep?"

"Sheep?" Alexander shot back. "I know about all kinds of animals!"

"You know about all kinds of animals, do you!" sneered August. "Well, you probably know a good bit about lice. But now that I'm buying up sheep, I might get you to do a bit of business in that line for me."

"You! You haven't any money!" said Alexander.

"I could do the buying myself," August continued, "but I can't be sure the Consul will like it to have so many folk coming to see me at the Manor. And I suppose I could open an office and hire me a few clerks here in town, but that wouldn't look right so long as I'm Altmulig in the Consul's service. Here, have a cigar?"

The Gypsy accepted the cigar, and said: "But I won't smoke it now that it's been in the hands of such an old puke as you. I could vomit every time I look at you."

They assailed each other with words and were anything but friendly, one toward the other, but at length they came to an agreement: the Gypsy would go out into the country districts and buy up sheep on all days he was free from the salmon net and his work in the smokehouse. He received instructions as to the making out of a proper document for each sale, a contract signed by the seller to the effect that the latter would himself drive his flock up the mountain on the very day of the sale, that over the winter he would feed the sheep he had sold at such and such a price, and so on. The Gypsy himself was to waste no time; this business demanded haste, for the summer was rapidly waning and it was August's hope to fill the mountain pasturage with sheep as swiftly as possible. "Ay, so you can take and begin tomorrow," he said. "Now are you sure that you understand everything?"

The Gypsy responded with an expert question, involving the devil of a fine point: "Is it mutton or shear sheep you're wanting?"

"What's that?"

"Do you want them for slaughter or for wool?"

August was silent for a time before answering. "Both kinds!" he said at length, but he was annoyed that he didn't know the difference between the various kinds of sheep.

They quarreled a bit about this matter and about many others. Alexander found it difficult to believe that August

had money and, at length, he demanded to see the colour of it. For how could he put his finger on several hundred *kroner* without knowing they actually existed? With regard to Alexander's pay, it was decided that he should receive a certain percentage of the purchase price for each sheep acquired at eighteen *kroner* and each lamb taken over at ten. "Look, here's an advance of five hundred *kroner*," said August. "See that you get busy tomorrow!"

"That's a pile of money you've got there!" exclaimed Alexander. "Did you find that book of yours?"

"Ay, I came across it when I was cleaning out my sack."

"Do you keep it on you at night?"

"The book? No," said August. "I leave it here in my pocket and I hang my coat up on the wall. As for myself, I lie in the bed."

He set out the following day on a lonely expedition; clad in his old clothes, a package of lunch, his revolver and a hundred cartridges in his pocket, he set out to skirt the lake in the mountains.

Another idea? Yes, an idea.

A careful survey of the lake had long preyed upon his mind as an important task to be undertaken, and he dared not delay it further. Were there—in the name of Heaven—trout in the lake? Had those waters actually been stocked by Theodore paa Bua, the Consul's father? Or was there a possibility that the fish had entered from the sea by way of some unknown brook? Could the existence of such a brook be established?

The old *altmuligmand* makes his journey afoot, fights his way along over rocks and through gullies, sometimes wading through water, sometimes forced far out of his way by natural obstacles, but he keeps on walking, advancing, covering the distance step by step. There is thor-

oughness in his march through the wilderness. At noon he reckoned it out that he had covered half the total distance; the hunting lodge was far out of sight and he had yet to come across the slightest sign of a brook which flowed from the lake. He ate his lunch, got out his revolver and began shooting. Target practice: shots at long and at short range, shots through his pocket, shots with his left hand, over his shoulder and with his eyes closed—he ran the entire gamut. He fired and laughed aloud—here was a grand pleasure, a thrilling joy, the echoing reports music to his ears, hahaha. . . .

At length he carefully polished that beloved revolver of his and resumed his march.

The afternoon wore on, fish began snapping at flies, not small fish, either, full-fledged lake trout. Occasionally they would turn round in mid air and for an instant appear as gleaming crescents.

All day long he had come across vast numbers of brooks gurgling down into the lake from the snow-capped peaks above, but none there were which flowed from the lake to the sea.

At six o'clock he stood beside the broad river which below formed the Segelfoss, the falls from which the town had taken its name, and here he was forced to halt. The river was low at this season of the year but was, even so, an effective bar to his progress. Naturally. He pretended to himself that he had been aware of this the whole time, but he was nevertheless unable to recover from the initial shock he had received. There he stood, confronted with a choice of returning the long way he had come around the lake or of attempting a descent of the steep bluff at the side of the falls to the big bridge which crossed the river below. Upon which course of action would he decide?

He sat down for a time and fell to whistling, for no especial reason, merely to give expression to the fun he was having, and at length he began whispering to him-

self: "So you thought you could cross the river here, did you? Not at all! I told you all along you'd find no steamer here to carry you across. Don't you remember that? I knew all about it; didn't I warn you in time——?"

He determined at length to try making his way down the sharp decline beside river and falls. He ought to be able to manage without trouble. He had often stared up at the mountain from below, and frightening indeed it had seemed. Ay, but here was a man who had climbed about in the tallest rigging of a big ship tossing at sea, and, if that had, in truth, been many a long year ago, wasn't he still thin and light of foot . . . ?

Step by step he descends. As he draws near the cataract, the mighty roar increases and he can no longer whisper to himself, can no longer fool himself with those silly lies and inventions of his. He has all he can do simply to plan his next foothold.

At the brink of the falls he is forced to give it up. This is as far as he can possibly proceed. Falling away at his feet is a sheer cliff which offers him no sign of a foothold. Now it may be that in his younger days he used to climb about in the rigging of a ship at sea, but surely he has never in his life dangled over the edge of a perpendicular mountain wall. Nothing doing there! Phew! Far below he observes Holmengraa's huge, deserted mill, and farther down the river a quiet pool, the scene of his recent baptism. Oh, that already quite forgotten baptism in the river—down there it had taken place with Cornelia looking on! A cloud of wet spray, swept up from the falls, blows over him, and with that he begins clambering back up the slope. Nothing else for him to do! Half way to the top he sits down to rest. The roar from the cataract has faded into silence.

"I told you how it would be!" he whispered to himself.

But 'tis an ill wind which blows no one some good. Seated there, he settles upon an excellent route which will

lead him back home, and, with that, he crawls to his feet: by walking far enough east, he can follow a diagonal course down through his mountain pasturage and from there make a gradual and easy descent into South Parish. And this would not take him as long as it would, were he to retrace his steps and circle the lake again. Furthermore he was not opposed to finding himself again in South Parish.

Two hours later he encounters his own flocks and their shepherds. Well-fed and contented, the sheep have settled down for the night and Jørn Mathildesen and his wife are seated beneath an overhanging ledge of rock at their supper of cold food and black coffee. An ample roof for their heads, a bag of hay and a skin rug farther back beneath the ledge, and this is their home on the mountain. Conditions could not be better for them; Valborg was a comely wife to have and Jørn himself a different fellow entirely when not obliged to beg for a living.

They had received thirty-one sheep today, they told him, and these, added to their original twenty-seven, gave them a present flock of fifty-eight head. They reckoned things out in scores in order to avoid overstraining those feeble brains of theirs with large figures—"three score missing two," was their manner of expressing the figure "fifty-eight."

"Pity 'tis they've laid them down!" said Valborg, regarding the sheep. For now August could not see how pretty they were. She didn't have the heart to disturb them, she said, now that they were nicely settled down for the night. But there were a number of lovely little lambs in the flock and a pair of huge rams with horns, she explained.

"Mutton sheep or shear sheep?" asked August.

She was ignorant of the distinction and August was obliged to drop the question. But what did he care about these sheep as sheep! Casting a hasty glance over the little

clusters of sleeping creatures, it was the number, the exact figure alone, which interested him. . . . Alexander had done well the first day, but once he had hit his stride, he would doubtless be able to do even better, perhaps buying up as many as a hundred head a day.

August was invited to partake of black coffee, cold pork and a slice of bread and, during the course of the repast, he and his hosts exchanged the usual civilities. "You'll not want for anything now!" he said. "Heavens, how can we ever thank you!" they replied.

They shared with him all they had and that hungry old man, he felt considerably enlivened as the result of this food and drink. Jørn and Valborg together were now earning five whole *kroner* a day, splendid wages for such as they and more than they had ever before earned in their lives. August now presented them with ten-*kroner* as an extra bonus "to split" between them, and with that he rose and left them.

South Parish already lay sound asleep. He had so directed his course that he came down fair on Tobias' land, but the house was as still as death and there was not even a dog to bark a warning. . . . Now certainly there was nothing singular in his desire to stop in and learn how the lad Mattis had liked his accordion . . . ?

He took a turn over in the direction of the horse. It was, as usual, gnawing away at the stubble, and the moment it caught sight of him, it laid back its ears and glared at him. A horse-crazy mare that had spells, she belonged with the devil in hell, she did! August simply could not stand for her another day. He strode back to the house to knock on the door and issue a curt order in regard to this matter. He knew very well which window was Cornelia's. . . .

Cornelia's window had no curtains, but what difference did that make to him? He knew his place—he would not peer inside, he would simply knock on the window.

"Cornelia!" he called softly, his mustache already beginning to quiver.

No answer.

"Cornelia, you're to have another horse!"

Silence.

Ay, but the devil and all, he had important business with her! She should be so good as to listen to him, it was urgent that she have another horse. "Cornelia!" he called again, this time aloud and imperiously.

No answer.

He scratched on the pane with his finger-nail.

No answer.

He shielded his eyes and peered into the room. . . .

Within lay none but sleeping children, the new accor-dion in bed with Mattis—but no Cornelia.

Hm, so she was out running around, eh? God knew where—in town perhaps, possibly in North Parish—but, in any event, out running around. . . .

He hears someone moving about inside the house and in a few moments Tobias, barefoot in nightshirt and trousers, appears at the door. He is not angry, he merely steps outside. "Isn't Cornelia there?" he asks.

August is immediately somewhat flustered. "No, it doesn't seem like it," he says.

"Then she must have gone some place."

"I just wanted to warn her about that horse," says August.

"Ay? Well well."

"You mustn't think of keeping that horse around another day. I'm going to shoot her."

Tobias sees no reason for such extreme action. "We'll take and get her covered," he suggests.

This solution to the problem has never occurred to August and he inquires if that would help things.

"Ay, right off!" Tobias asserts.

"Then you should have done it before."

"Right enough, what you say is certainly so! But we had to wait till we got the hay in, you see."

August is impatient at once. "Will you take her tomorrow?" he demands.

"No, you see, we must wait a bit, for she isn't having one of her spells just now. Cornelia, she can handle her like nothing at all these days."

"She's a nasty tempered beast!" fumes August. "I went over to her tonight and I thought she was going to jump on me."

"That was because you're a stranger."

"All right, all right, all right! Stranger or no stranger, you've got to do something about her!"

Again Tobias sees no reason for heroic measures. "I imagine that in three or four weeks she'll have one of her spells again, and when she does Cornelia will take her to the stallion."

"What's that—Cornelia!" August snorts. "You're going to let that Cornelia take out a ferocious mare in heat!"

"She knows so much more about it than the rest of us."

"Where is that Cornelia?" August asks severely.

"If only I knew and could tell you!"

"For I want to forbid her to go with the mare."

"I wouldn't say as you shouldn't," Tobias says, falling in line.

"Say, what the devil does that Cornelia mean by running around at night?"

"Maybe you can tell me!"

August left the farm with bitterness in his breast, quite forgetting to ask Mattis about his new accordion. What had he gained from having returned home by way of South Parish? He might easily have found a way down beside the falls and long ago been home—what was a mere precipice of fifteen hundred feet! Had he not stood at the brink of the world's most appalling precipices and easily found his way down!

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

IT turned out exactly as August had predicted; Alexander, in a few days, was buying up sheep at the rate of a hundred a day, and the flock on the mountain was already beginning to assume enormous proportions. The rainy season set in and there was fresh grass for the creatures to munch; they throve and grew fat, their fleeces became rich and silky, and no accidents occurred.

Then there was a brief interruption of purchasing activities; Alexander was obliged to take in some salmon, as he was, first of all, the Consul's man. He was nevertheless reluctant to abandon his new profession, earning as he was a splendid daily wage as the result of his diligence and cunning and well provided with funds from August at the beginning of each day. Alexander therefore spent two days at his nets and in the smokehouse, and by that time he had his cases of smoked salmon ready for shipment and lost no time getting back to his sheep-buying.

August was pleased with developments; his flocks were ever increasing and each evening the Gypsy Alexander would come to him with an honest accounting of the day's expenditures, no question about that. Could anything better be hoped for! August was again on the upward path in life, but this time in grand style and as a man of wealth. Money was at his disposal, thousands upon thousands, and a joy it was to see how that business of his was developing! Yes, he would keep on buying sheep till he came to the end of his rope. It was as though he could find no peace or rest until he had put his money into some-

thing, into some wild speculation, the turn of a wheel. Had not chance led him to buy up sheep, chance would have led him to buy up something else. Success, and he smiles with Dame Fortune, failure and he has no time to brood, for in the long run it means turnover and activity, the very life blood of world trade, foreign exchange and banking—it is the spirit of the age we live in, it is life itself.

And now he had got his name in the paper; that splendid fellow, Davidsen, had written about him in the *Segelfoss News*. . . . Davidsen had one day suddenly found himself a banker and in good faith he would perform his new duties, but first and foremost he was a journalist, the editor of that tiny well-meaning paper of his. He wrote glowingly of August—this humane and expert individual who had both the will and the means to spread good amongst people and animals. The country districts comprising a wide area were deeply indebted to August for having opened up enormous mountain pasture lands for smaller livestock, and so on. . . .

Over night August had become a man of importance in the community; the people had taken to greeting him on the street whether they knew him or not, and public respect for him had grown apace. As he became accustomed to the feelings of wealth, he curbed his taste for shrieking personal embellishment, abandoned his red shirts for those of classic white, and cast aside his multi-coloured belt with its huge nickel buckle. Otherwise, he was the old August and could never change.

His acquaintance from past nights at the card table, the Anabaptist merchant in town who dealt in Russian Bibles—this fellow made a point to greet him with extravagant respect and one day had the gall to seek to borrow some money from him. August should have it back at the end of three months, plus interest, he promised.

"I have no money to loan out," said August. "I *use* my money!" And with that, he strode off.

But the merchant strode off with him. That wretched baptism, its magic had long since ceased to be effective, so far as he was concerned, his customers had quit coming to that little shop of his and had gone back to other dealers who had not even got themselves totally immersed.

"Ay, there you see," said August. "Isn't it just what I told you, that such kind of baptising is the worst kind of swinishness in matters too holy to trifle with!"

Yes, the merchant agreed with him, but now everything had gone so awry with him—wife, children, local taxes, a bill for nails and rope and soft soap—that it didn't look as though he would ever be able to pull himself out of the hole.

August had nothing to spare for this worthless fellow who on his very first visit to his room had attempted to sneak off with a brand-new deck of cards. But, of course, in the end he helped him, pulled him out of the hole, though much in the manner of a mighty British sea captain tossing from his own plenty a ten-pound note to some impoverished sailor.

On the other hand, when Boldemand came to him for help, he got it man to man. The navvy Boldemand had come to his old boss and explained that he was afraid he was being cheated by Lawyer Pettersen.

How was that?

It seemed that Boldemand and his fellow-workmen had been busy excavating and cementing a cellar for Button-head's new house and had already come a great way with the foundation walls. And then if the lawyer hadn't come to them and demanded that the whole plan be changed——!

"Well, but after all isn't that his business?" August asked.

"Ay, but here he wants as we shall rip out the walls and put in new ones all for the one price!" said Boldemand.

"No, that won't go at all!" August decided.

He went at once to the lawyer and demanded an ex-

planation. From what he could gather from the statements made by the lawyer, the masons had been working without a blue print, merely from the spoken word, and the whole thing had been a mistake.

"Didn't you have a written contract between you?" August asked.

"No."

"But didn't you go there yourself every day to see what the masons were doing?"

"Yes, but what good did that do?" the lawyer returned. "My wife was after them all the time to divide the basement off into a food cellar and a laundry and an oven to boil the clothes on and all sorts of other things——"

"All necessary parts to a man's house!"

"Yes, but I won't have them!" cried the lawyer. "This place isn't to be a man's house—it's to be a building!"

August stared with open mouth. The lawyer's face had taken on such a weird expression; through the glass of his spectacles his eyes were staring wildly.

"I can't seem to make out your meaning," said August.

The lawyer explained emphatically: "It's simple to understand—I want this place for a bank. Yes. A bank building. All I need is a small fireproof space in the cellar for the money. What do I want with an oven?"

"Oh, so that's it!" said August, now utterly at a loss.

"Yes. And I won't have a food closet and food to smear up the money. I'll get an injunction! I simply won't give in!"

August saw no reason why he should continue to listen to the ravings of a madman and, with that, he rose to leave. The lawyer, however, restrained him. "I've been reading about you in the paper," he says. "You are a man with an enormous fortune and with a brilliant head on your shoulders. Listen to me now for a moment: here on my land I'm putting up an all-stone building and will take in money for safe keeping and investment. This will be the solidest private bank in all Nordland and will drive

the Segelfoss Savings Bank out of existence inside of a few months. Even the tower will be of stone. Give this matter your most serious consideration and deposit your funds with me if only ten thousand or so at a time!"

"I suppose I might be able to," said August, partially yielding to flattery.

"Yes, do so! Rely upon me in the beginning! And you can have a written contract, too, if you like. Sit down again for a moment!" said the lawyer and began pawing about on his desk in search of the proper form to fill out.

But it was not August's desire to bind himself that day; at the time there was his sheep ranch. "I'll think it over," he said. "But if you're of a mind to draw up a contract between yourself and those masons of yours, that's another matter."

"Masons!" fumed the lawyer. "They're to do what I tell them!"

No mistake, the man was out of his head.

August would have to advise Boldemand and his fellows to lay off work for a time. "Here, lads, here's a bit of change to tide you over in the meantime!"

"Good Lord, boss! You don't mean that, do you?"

"What, my old workmen I've been through thick and thin with!" said August, touched. "You'll never have to suffer for anything as long as I am here in Segelfoss."

He stepped into the bank and withdrew some more of his money. Things were grand indeed with him, amazing—all should see to what a colossal extent his enterprise in sheep was developing.

Today Davidsen was alone in the bank, and that kind Davidsen, he granted himself the privilege of letting fall a hint—he uttered a wee tiny warning—not by direct word, merely by a certain inflection of the voice. Now the Consul would never have done a thing like that.

It had come out when August, jocularly and facetiously, had said: "I suppose you're thinking it's a deal of money I'm drawing out this time, eh?"

No, Davidsen had not offered jest for jest, had not laughed and assured him that there was plenty left where this had come from, that it was still a long way to the bottom, that even Vanderbilt had been unable to use up all his millions before he died. No, Davidsen, with a trace of sorry concern on his face, had merely said: "After all, it's *your* money!" Now the Consul would never have said a thing like that.

August straightened up at once and asked: "Isn't the Consul here any more?"

"No, unfortunately," Davidsen answered. "No, I'm alone now. But I won't be here for long. The responsibility is too great for me, and the first time I find I have made a mistake, I'll pick up my hat and leave."

"You don't suppose you have made a mistake by giving me these few thousand, do you?" asked August sarcastically.

"Oh no, oh no!" returned Davidsen. But, to be on the safe side, he glanced once more into the bank-book and said: "No, this is quite all right."

As though the Consul would have permitted himself so hostile a gesture.

"I'll have a word with the Consul," said August and left the bank.

He called at once upon Gordon Tidemand and reported the difficulty which existed between the masons and Lawyer Pettersen. It seemed that the lawyer was trying to get them to work for him without pay. What would the Herr Consul advise them to do in this matter, if the Herr Consul would pardon him for asking?

The Consul waited a time before answering. "That is a matter I know very little about, or to be exact, nothing at all. But I imagine that the magistrate might be able to do something in regard to it. It surely appears that Pettersen's brain has begun to be affected. He's written me several times about buying up all my outstanding

claims, but I've never even bothered to answer him. And then a day or two ago he came himself to call on me here in my office and with him he brought a chair to sit on!"

August could never permit himself to laugh in the Consul's presence. Therefore, he held strictly to the question before them and said: "He tells me he's decided to build him a bank instead of a home, and now he wants that the workmen shall tear out the entire cellar wall without paying them for the work they've already done."

The Consul glanced at his watch. "I've still time to see the judge today. Would you care to come along with me?"

It was a good thing that August was no longer conspicuously attired. He might even have passed for a consul himself as he sat there in the car beside Gordon Tide-mand, what with his silk-lined coat, the corner of a white handkerchief peeping from his breast pocket, a white collar about his neck, and on his head a bowler fashionably worn. All he lacked was a pair of yellow gloves.

They discussed the problem with the magistrate. No, the way of the law was long and tortuous—summons and complaint, answer and trial, judgment and appeal, further proceedings and possibly further appeal. Endless hocus-pocus. No, the law was out of the question in a case involving poor workmen like these, but it might be possible to do something in a private way. "Neither the Consul nor I should be able to get anywhere at all with Herr Pettersen," said the judge. "We're not exactly on good terms with him after our having kicked him out of the bank. But I wonder if possibly Druggist Holm might not be able to accomplish something in the general direction. The two are old acquaintances and I've often observed that though they have bitten and stabbed each other rather severely, they have always remained firm friends. What would you gentlemen say to having a talk with the druggist?"

They drove over to the drugstore, and there they

learned a serious piece of news: Fru Pettersen had, the previous day, been to Doctor Lund to ask him to examine her husband, as his brain had been acting queerly of late. "The doctor then came to me," said the druggist, "and together we went and had a long talk with Pettersen. Of course he is insane, no doubt about it! He showed us about that new place of his and told us he was going to make it over into a bank. The building was to cost him a million and the basement was to be equipped with armour plate! His wife was with us and spent most of her time weeping and praying to God. We both agreed with her that the best thing for her husband would be a trip south and that I should attempt to talk him into it and accompany him, if he were willing to go. Then, if the sea voyage should prove insufficient to pull him out of his condition, I should be obliged to leave him in some sanatorium."

"Do you think you'll be able to get him to go on such a trip?" asked the Consul.

"Yes," said the druggist. "We've already decided upon it together. We'll go south and buy up the armour plate!"

"When do you sail?"

"This evening."

"It's a pity about those masons of his. They'll be out of work now," said the Consul. "They must find something to do, mustn't they?"

August: "I told them to quit for a time until we see which way the wind's blowing."

"But can they afford to be idle?"

"Ay," said August.

They drove back to the office. The devil and all if August didn't feel proud to be motoring about town with the Consul! He himself would touch that new bowler of his each time the Consul acknowledged a greeting. Quite a difference between now and before! August thought to himself.

They stepped out in front of the Consulate.

"From one thing to another, Altmulig," said the Consul. "Do you recall my telling you that a certain English gentleman would visit me during the hunting season? Fine. And do you remember as well that I requested you to think up some special way in which I might entertain him?"

"I've been giving that a good bit of thought," said August. "When is the lord coming?"

"He's salmon fishing up in Finmark now, but the season for that will soon be closed. He'll come at that time."

"There's trout in the lake up the mountain," said August.

"Really? Trout?"

"So you could do some fishing, anyway. Fly fishing."

It took the Consul a moment or two to realize the full import of the discovery August had made in the interest of British sport. "Trout in that mountain lake?" he asked stupidly.

"Fine big trout. I've been seeing them there for some time now."

"Trout in the mountain lake and no one knew about them?" puzzled the Consul. "How in the world did they get there? Not even a salmon could leap the Segelfoss!"

August explained the situation: the Consul's father had stocked the lake with trout many long years ago, had imported two buckets of younglings and released them there in the lake, had created life in dead waters and had kept still about it——

"How do you know about that?"

"I have talked," said August, "with the man your father had along to help him."

The Consul was too much of a gentleman to explode with emotion, but he was certainly on the point of clasp- ing his hands in ecstasy. They discussed the matter in further detail: wouldn't it likewise be closed season for trout?

But August was a man of many resources: in the first

place the season for rod fishing for trout was a month longer than the season for netting salmon in sea and river——

"Yes, and that's all the time we need!" exclaimed the Consul. "He won't be with us a full month. He'll be here two weeks at the most. After that, he's due back home. But you said 'in the first place'——?"

"Ay, and in the second place," continued August, "the fish in the lake are not sea trout. They didn't go up from the sea, so fishing for them can never be forbidden."

"No no. Of course not. My, wasn't he a remarkable man, that father of mine!"

"Ay, that's just what the old grave-digger told me. A studious and thoughtful man, he said."

"But to think that no one ever knew anything about it!" marveled the Consul.

"That helper of his told me that he himself promised your father to keep quiet about it," said August. "It had to be a secret to keep folk from going up there and fishing out the lake before the trout had time to grow up."

"Yes, yes, of course! A splendid precaution. And I must have been abroad at the time and father forgot to write me about it. He had so many matters to take care of. He was burgomaster and everything under the sun in those days, you know."

"We must see about taking some kind of a row boat up there to the lake," said August.

"Yes, see to that, will you, Altmulig? If we haven't a proper boat here on the place, you may order one in my name."

Marvelous what money could do for a man, even where his attitude toward himself was concerned. Here he was, discussing a certain problem with the Consul almost on equal terms. And the Consul was no longer addressing him as a servant, he was now quite innocently saying "*De*"

to him. August's bankbook was probably the key to the situation, that and his genteel clothes. And here today, though he was still respectful to his betters, though he still subjected himself to the strictest of self-discipline, he no longer put himself down, no longer crossed himself on the slightest provocation, and he even ventured to say, regarding to the boat: "The one on the sloop would do."

The Consul seemed startled. "But then the sloop would not be complete, in the event we had use for her, would she?"

"That sloop——" said August slowly—— "If that sloop was mine, I believe I'd get rid of her. Pardon me for mentioning such a thing!"

"Get rid of her? You would?"

"A vessel like that—you see, you need wind to get out with her, and by the time there's wind enough to move her, it may be too late to go where you're hoping to go with her. All vessels of that size these days have engines to drive them along—just like that motor boat of yours."

"Yes," said the Consul, thoughtfully.

"It's nothing to have a sloop like that lying here waiting for a herring call," August continued. "The sea is always full of small steamers and motor craft which can answer a call in a few hours, while a sloop like this simply lies over waiting for a breeze."

"Yes," said the Consul. "What you say is no doubt correct, Altmulig, and I'll have to give the problem some thought. What would a motor craft cost?"

"All depends upon the size. Perhaps you could even fit out the sloop with an engine of some kind. How old is she?"

"I really couldn't say. She's been here as long as I can remember."

No, as a matter of fact, Consul Gordon Tidemand knew very little about sloops—his province was banking and

exchange and business administration. Perhaps he didn't even know why he kept that ancient vessel of his lying there in the harbour. No, but he could speak to his mother about it.

He glanced at his watch and asked: "Where are you off to? Home?"

"Ay, to begin with."

"All right, jump in again and we can drive home together. I'd like to tell the ladies about the trout up there in the lake. How are things with you these days, Altmulig?"

"Fine, and thanks for the asking."

"I can't tell you how it pleases me to hear that! And, as you say, we might as well take that boat from the sloop."

Alexander was waiting for additional capital before setting out on his next expedition. Very well, there was August with a pocket full of money. How much?

Alexander explained himself in some detail: he would have to penetrate far into the neighbouring parishes this time—it would hardly be worth while to call at the farms close by the town and scrape the bottom for sheep. He would be gone several days, would gather up an enormous flock all at one time, a whole drove——

"Very well? How much?"

"Four thousand," said Alexander. "Unless you think that's too much."

"Blueberries for me!" said August.

August was not opposed to having his purchasing agent think in large terms whilst operating in his name. A whole drove of sheep and lambs added to those he already had at graze in the mountains would round out the first thousand. Business was looking up.

When Alexander was receiving the money, he said: "Now, you needn't expect me home for the first few days."

August waved him aside. He had other things to do

than to wait around for the Gypsy to return; he had altogether too many important matters to attend to. The most important of these arose from the fact that he had not as yet seen Cornelia to forbid her to go with the mare. This duty demanded his immediate attention, for how easily misfortune might result from his neglect. He would never be able to forgive himself.

As it had begun to drizzle, he stepped into the Segelfoss Store and purchased an umbrella. Then, as he could afford to cut something of a figure and appear as a person of luxury, he looked grandly at his umbrella and said off-handedly: "I say, give me another of these things!" And with two umbrellas in his hand and the newspaper article about him in his pocket, he set out for South Parish.

No one rushed out of Tobias' house to receive him. This time proved no exception to the rule. All right as for that, he was the man he was, a man whom folk greeted when they saw him, a man who filled the columns of newspapers. He set down his umbrellas and stepped inside the house.

"Peace!" he said, in greeting.

"Thanks. Find yourself a chair."

August went at it immediately; he forbade Cornelia to go with the mare, said he would not take the responsibility.

Her astonishment knew no bounds and she looked with mouth agape at her parents.

"Ay, 'tis no small responsibility," echoed Tobias.

"And I don't want you to be kicked or bitten to death," continued August. "Hey there, Mattis, how did you like that new instrument of yours?"

"He's playing it night and day," his father answered for the lad. "Ay, but that was a grand gift you gave him!"

"And I offered that Cornelia an even grander gift, but she said no to it," August declared.

Her mother looked at her severely and said: "Cornelia, you ought to be ashamed!"

"You can all take and let me alone!" exclaimed Cornelia and flounced down on a chair to card some wool.

August fell to talking about one thing and another; he was in a position to do so now, he could afford to be tolerant of the actions of a mere petulant girl. "Ay, so now I suppose there's forage for the cattle after the rain?"

"Ay," answered Tobias' wife. "Ay, now we've milk from the cows."

"I'm mindful to show you this," said August handing Cornelia the newspaper he had in his pocket. "What do you say to this?"

But it seemed she had read the article; Benjamin from North Parish had brought her a copy to show her. Disappointed, August returned the paper to his pocket and said: "Oh well, it wasn't anything anyway!"

"Oh yes, 'twas so!" contradicted Tobias and wagged his head long and lustily to show how deeply he had been impressed. "A man they write about in the papers and all that!" And with that Tobias left the house.

In a few moments he was followed by his wife.

"You mustn't always go out like that, mother!" Cornelia called after her. "I'm not going to change what I said!"

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself!" her mother whispered back at her and disappeared.

"What won't you change that you said?" August asked. No answer.

He kept after her. "Have you thought over what I said to you the last time, Cornelia?" he asked.

"What was that?"

"Oh, so you don't even remember it! I told you I wanted to marry you."

"You must be crazy!" she said. "Ugh! And you so old!"

A blow in the solar plexus! August had the wind

knocked out of him. When at last he was able to speak, he said: "I'm no older than a good many others. And besides, things are so with me that I could dress you in velvet and pearls!"

Oh, but this ill-timed swagger of his produced not the slightest effect upon her; she had heard it all before. Nor did it do anything to stiffen his own spirit. He was cowed at once and pitiful, his mustache was quivering again, and his eyes were milk and water. "I come here and I come here," he says weakly, "and I can't seem to stay at home. What is there for me? At night I can't sleep and I go over to the window and gaze off into the distance where you are. I can't stay home when I'm like that and so I come out here. I'm sorry if my talk goes against you!"

"Ay, we've been all over that before," she said.

"What do you mean? Haven't I had business here every time? Didn't I come out to look at the horse and buy your sheep and get that Mattis started with a decent instrument and all that? And, after all, I'm not exactly a person you have to feel ashamed of," he bragged again and spoiled everything. "You can tell them that from me! But you can't seem to understand that I'm just about half-crazy, but when you grow up and can't sleep nights, maybe you'll feel like I do. And then, if you're still alive, you'll know what it's like not to be like you used to be, no appetite and no rest in you like you used to have. Soon I won't know what to do with myself. But I can be just as young and healthy again as anyone else if only you will have me, Cornelia, and make me like a man again."

"No, you must keep still about all that. It just can't be, that's all."

"But I'm mindful to try!" he said, disconsolately. "After all we are to each other, you and I——"

"No, what is it we are to each other?"

"Ay, you know—right here in town the first time I met

you on the street and you looked at me, I felt the deepest kindness and love for you, deeper than you'll ever get from anyone else in——"

Cornelia drops her work and leaps to her feet. She would put an end to this scene. But now, when words were no longer capable of expressing his feelings, he caught her in his arms and dragged her down on his lap. He was old but his arms were still sinewy and she had some trouble before she could tear herself free from his grasp and retreat to the middle of the room. Nor did she seem so greatly annoyed by his action; no one could have taken the situation more sweetly. "No, now you mustn't stay here any longer," she said.

"You want me to go?"

"Ay, for now I must go out and look to a pot on the stove."

"You're showing me out? Will you listen to that, Mattis, that sister of yours is showing me out!"

"No, that's not what I meant," she said.

"When I sit here with nothing but love for you and ask you——"

"Ay, but I don't want you!" said Cornelia. "Now drop it!" she said.

No, she had not meant to show him out exactly, she had merely given him something of an urgent invitation to leave. There was no mistaking her desires in the matter, and, pulling himself together, he began edging toward the door. The bones in his old legs creaked, he took short shuffling steps, he moved like an automaton. He picked up one umbrella from beside the door and left the other standing there. She'll find it all right, he thought to himself.

The same today again, every day the same, he could not seem to get anywhere with her. But he had discovered one thing, that her parents were working for him, and this at least brought him some joy. God knew whether

that Benjamin, poor fellow, was as well off in this respect as he was. August was even inclined to doubt it.

Nevertheless, August would not be in haste to return to South Parish where he might get back into the habit of exaggerating. That was one thing certain. At most, he would return only once more to get her to give him a serious answer to his proposal. She owed him that much, at least.

On the way home he falls to thinking about the boat he is to take up to the lake. He goes aboard the sloop, wanders about in her hold, goes over her, inch by inch, digs into her timbers here and there with his knife to determine her state of decay. She must have been a spanking little craft in her younger days when she was the property of Theodore paa Bua, and in spite of the neglect she had suffered in her old age, she was still a fit vessel for a motor.

He goes up on deck and unlashes the boat.

Whilst he is busy with this task, the south-bound passenger steamer whistles and comes steaming in from the sea. Many folk are waiting on the pier: Druggist Holm and Lawyer Pettersen, bound for a sea voyage south; Doctor Lund, come to see them off, Fru Pettersen standing there weeping her eyes out. Her husband comforts her and explains that he is compelled to make this voyage south for the purpose of procuring some armour plate for his bank vault.

Gammelmoderen is there too and waves gaily to Druggist Holm in spite of the staring multitude. Bless her for the enormous courage she has to live life! In order to spare her reputation, the druggist barely returns her wave. But with that she walks out to the end of the pier and compels him to wave to her. And see how sweetly she smiles!

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

A COUPLE of days later the doctor's small sons brought August a note from Alexander. But they were so unruly, those youngsters, they had vanished before August could make out the writing, before he could ask them a question.

The note read as follows:

"Right side of the horse. One hand forward from loin and two and a half hands from withers, that's it. Stab ever so little downward, not so careful. Two inches deep. Otto Alexander."

August decided that this must be the formula for stabbing horses for colic. He thrust the note into his pocket and wondered, firstly, why this information had been tendered him at all, and secondly, why the Gypsy had sent it to him by messenger instead of coming to him in person. What could the whole thing signify?

That evening he received word that Gammelmoderen wished to speak with him. He had had it in mind to make a certain trip, on a matter of important business, but here now Gammelmoderen was calling for him.

He found her abed in her room, pale and still and expectant.

"I'm in bad shape," she said.

"No, never you!" said August. "What's the matter?"

"I've been wounded, Altmulig, and now you must do me a favour and tell me what I'm to do."

"That depends upon whether I can! What kind of a wound is it?"

"A wound where I cut myself. I'm afraid to call the doctor, for he'll only ask me a lot of questions. And the

druggist has gone away. Oh, if only the druggist hadn't gone away!"

"Let me see your wound," said August. "Is it bleeding?"

"No, not now."

She threw aside the bed covers and opened wide the front of her nightgown, exactly as though he were a doctor.

"In the breast!" he exclaimed. "How did you get that?"

"With a knife. Heavens, how it hurt!"

August looked at her. "Hm, a stab with a knife, eh?"

"Yes, a stab. Do you think it's bleeding internally?"

He did not reply to this, but said: "It couldn't have been much of a knife! I've seen great huge knives to carry in your boot, but a mere sheath-knife to carry in your belt, that's nothing. What did you put on it?"

"Nothing. Only a rag. I washed it out first and then I laid this rag on it."

"Ay, a rag is good enough," said August. "I've never used anything else. But I can ask the doctor about it."

"Oh, if only you would! But you mustn't tell him how I was wounded. Tell him I stumbled upstairs and fell on a knife."

"By all means!" said August. "When did it happen, last evening?"

"Yes, last night. Right here at my window."

August shook his head over this explanation.

"A big hole here in my nightgown, too, right here in front," said Gammelmoderen. "A brand-new nightgown!"

"Did it bleed much?"

"Oh yes, it bled quite a bit. I've since washed my nightgown so no one should see the blood. No one else knows about it."

"I'm sorry for you!" he said.

"Yes, I know you are, Altmulig, for you've always been so nice to me," she replied. . . .

August was back in no time and, on his return, he asked to see the wound again, took a corner of the rag in his fingers and, with a sudden jerk, ripped off the bandage. "Excuse me!" he said.

"Oo, that hurt terribly!"

"That's what the doctor told me to do, for the wound must bleed a little more, he said. And then he said as I should pour in the wound a drop or two of the stuff here in this bottle. It won't smart much, he said, but it will do you a lot of good."

August poured in a good bit of the fluid and of course it smarted in the wound. It smarted like Satan's own and beads of cold sweat appeared on Gammelmøderen's face during the worst of it. But she did not moan or groan, she merely clenched her hands till her arms shook. At length he placed a plaster patch over the wound and said: "Now it will heal up real quick, and that you can believe!"

"What did the doctor say? What did he ask you?"

"Nothing, for I told him it was one of my road gang as was wounded and he's treated them for wounds before. You know, they get silly sometimes and lose their temper and stab each other and so——"

It would now be possible for him to make that little trip he had been contemplating and at the same time work on a matter of vast importance. He was already well on his way, but when he came to the Segelfoss Store, he found it closed, and he would be unable to purchase that article of prime necessity he had had in mind—a bit of lovely edging lace with which to trim a nightgown. He had seen such lace on Gammelmøderen.

There was nothing else for it but to give up the trip, to return home and brood, to return home and do his best to get through another night. He now had all which life could offer him, all save peace of mind.

But there were others who were likewise having a hard

time of it and in the morning Gammelmoderen sent for him again. She had put in a night of torture, of fitful sleep and bad dreams. "Don't hold it against me, Altmulig," she said, "but you don't know how miserable I am! If only the druggist were home!"

August thought for a moment, then said: "He certainly ought to be on his way back by this time."

"Do you really think so?"

"Long ago. He'll be here in another day."

She took heart at this. "But if only I could be sure I'm not bleeding internally."

"Oh no, there's no reason for you to worry about that!" August decided in that reassuring manner of his. "Why, bless your heart, I've had ten revolver bullets in me and many more knife stabs than that all at one time, but I never bled internally."

Again she was cheered, but, even so, she asked: "Yes, but when is it then that we bleed internally?"

"Oh, that's when the blade goes right through your body and comes out the other side," said August. "It's only then you can talk about bleeding internally. For that's when nature can't seem to heal things. But knives which will do a thing like that are not to be found in these parts."

"That's what you say! But I've heard of people bleeding internally."

August reassured her further: "But in that case, you wouldn't have lived half an hour. No. You'd be lying here stiff and dead by this time. Ay. And at this time tomorrow, we'd be carrying you off to your grave. Think of that! We wouldn't even have had time enough to bring in the priest and the last Communion. And the blood would have come out of you and soaked the entire bed."

"Uf!" said Gammelmoderen.

"Do you hurt any place?"

"Yes, it seems so. But let that be as it is," she said, dis-

couraged. "I can't do anything about it. Here, let me ask you one thing, Altmulig: that time you were aboard the sloop to lock up the cabin—didn't you find a belt in the bunk?"

"Ay," he said. "Ay, not only a belt, but some hairpins and other female stuff. And I knew right off that the skipper's wife had left these things there. What do you ask me that for?"

"What did you do with those things?"

"Oh, they weren't worth returning. I heaved them overboard."

"Oh—and the buckle was solid silver!" exclaimed the widow of Theodore paa Bua—"or, at least, so I've heard," she added quickly.

"Mm no—the buckle was only nickel-plated iron," said August.

"Good Heavens, so you threw it into the sea, then! But it was bought and paid for as silver—I've heard," she added again. "Oh well, let that be as it is. I've other things to think about now if I'm bleeding internally."

"You aren't bleeding internally any more than I am!" August insisted. "Here's one thing I was going to ask you—we ought to be hauling up the salmon net, but we haven't any crew."

"Hm," she said indifferently. Her thoughts were no longer concerned with fish nets and worldly goods.

"That Alexander, he's away."

"Hm."

"You know, Alexander, that Gypsy lad as was here. He's out buying up sheep for me and he won't be able to get back and haul in the salmon net. This is the fourth day, so I don't know——"

August had begun to harbour certain misgivings in regard to the Gypsy. Where had he disappeared to and why had he sent that note? Nor had Gammelmoderen been able or willing to render anything of an account of him. But

the fellow had, in any event, gone off with four thousand of August's money.

The first thing August did was to take the gardener Steffen with him to haul in the salmon net. It must be left idle no longer. There was only one salmon in it, but a large one, a salmon for the Consul's table. So there was the finish of that.

The next thing August would have to do would be to get hold of the doctor's sons. This proved no easy matter for him as the youngsters were not at home. However, at lunch time, he found them—out at the parsonage where they were busy helping to make hay. The devil and all if they weren't two smart little lads, though! They were working like regular hands, clad in no more than shirt and trousers, and though they were to earn no more than a meal or two. They had made a definite bargain with the pastor's man.

"How's this?" the pastor's man had asked.

"Rice pudding at home today," said the youngsters.

"Here all we'll have will be herring," said the man.

"Fine!" the boys had replied.

To August they explained that the night before they had run down to the pier upon hearing the north-bound steamer whistling at the harbour mouth, and it was down on the pier that Alexander had handed them the note for August. And at the last minute he had jumped aboard the ship.

The Gypsy had thus headed north.

He had performed his last task ashore and the ground was burning beneath his boot soles; he had hastened down to the pier, scuttled aboard the ship, decamped.

But had he first bought sheep for four thousand *kroner*?

August makes tracks for South Parish. He has suddenly stumbled upon a new and important business matter to take him thence: he will send the lad Mattis up to the

mountain pasturage after Jørn Mathildesen and avail himself of this excuse to sit and wait.

Tobias and his entire household are out in the field making hay; it is a question now of rescuing all they can of the crop which has been lying out in the rain. The parents are on August's side, this day as well, and he observes the efforts they put forth to aid his cause. Cornelia, however, is not to be drawn aside; she shuns all possibility of a *tête-à-tête*. Singular conduct on her part; she was aware, was she not, that she owed him a serious answer?

They are likewise haying on the neighbouring farm and he decides to take a run up there. They have regarded him with no end of honour and respect ever since the day he purchased their sheep at such a fabulous price and to-day they greet him cordially and nod and smile at everything he says. They come out with the assertion that it is a grand blessing to see so many creatures at graze on the mountain.

"This is only the beginning!" August retorts.

He draws Hendrik to one side and quite casually asks him how things are going with him.

Thanks for asking, things aren't going so well for Hendrik. Cornelia has apparently finished with him for good and all now and, he had heard, she was even to have banns spoken at church next Sunday.

"Well, now I don't know about that," said August.

"Ay, she doesn't seem to remember the things she promised me," complained Hendrik. "Things were so settled between us and she fooled me into getting myself baptised in the summer and all that. But now I have no bicycle to go like the wind on like he has. And besides, he's now given her a heart to wear on a chain and a fur thing for her neck. Oh, I've seen them! So now there's so much between them that I wish as I was dead."

August is himself afflicted with the heartaches of hopeless adoration, but dashed if he is not likewise touched by

Hendrik's frantic state of mind. He is therefore stirred to action; he will do his best to put something in the way of this master cyclist Benjamin, this pompous little brat he himself had dragged from the family manure pile and provided with good wages for respectable work throughout an entire summer. August stands pondering the problem. His brain is still keen and ingenious. It is still capable of producing a brilliant idea. Suddenly he asks: "How soon will you be done with this haying of yours?"

"Right soon now," Hendrik replies. "We've just this bit that you see here to get in."

"All right, then I'll take you on as my man," said August.

Dumb amazement. The other stared at him with mouth agape, after hearing these words.

Jørn Mathildesen and Mattis appeared. August is brief and to the point whilst treating with them, in every respect a boss, a baron. "Here, Mattis, take this for your trouble! Now Jørn, have you been getting any new sheep of late?"

Jørn: "Not yesterday or today. But Tuesday and Wednesday we took in a mighty lot of them."

August adjusts his *pince-nez*, gets out paper and pencil and stands prepared to write. "All right, how many Tuesday?"

"Four score adding four."

August jots this down. "All right. And Wednesday?"

"Ay," said Jørn, "that was a terrible day! We took in a whole parish full that day. There were six score adding fifteen."

August jots down this figure and strikes a total. "Eleven score missing one for the two days!" He reckons further and discovers that he is from twenty-five to thirty head short of the number he ought to have had in return for his four thousand *kroner*. "He's cheated me out of seven hundred *kroner*!" he says.

"Who?" Jørn cries in alarm.

"That Gypsy. He's dug out on me."

"You don't say so!"

August waves him aside. "How many all together up there now?" he asks. "I didn't bring along my accounts."

Jørn has carried every transaction since the first day in his head, for such is his type of mind. "We've two-and-forty score missing three," he reports.

August shakes his head. Trouble enough for him now, defeat, frustration—he has yet to buy his thousandth sheep. He has all the money in the world, but not a thousand sheep. . . .

Jørn chatters on: "Fine creatures they are, both white and black. They're lean and hungry when they come to us, but a week sees quite a change in them, for by that time they've had enough to eat and are all filled out. You ought to see how they follow that Valborg around—ay, just like dogs, they are."

"Ay, there's nothing more now, Jørn!" says August with a curt nod of his head.

He returns to Hendrik, his head bowed deep in thought. Cheated out of seven hundred *kroner*—all right, it was well the loss had fallen upon a man who could bear it. His chief annoyance arose from the fact that the Gypsy had run off before he had rounded out the first thousand. Now folk would be able to say that he had only a few hundred!

He hired Hendrik right there on the spot, hired him to step into the Gypsy's shoes, arranged everything with him, gave him minute instructions. Such energy as there was in that old man August as he barked out his orders! "Throw down that rake of yours and right away go down to the store in Segelfoss. Pick out the finest and dearest wheel they've got there in stock, learn how to ride it to-night and start in work tomorrow covering the parishes both north and south of here. Come on now, get busy! Here's a thousand to start with!"

He makes no move to return to Tobias and his family; no, he declines to put himself forward any further this day. Just wait till Hendrik goes whizzing by on that splendid new wheel of his, just wait till the entire neighbourhood learns of the important position for which that Hendrik has been selected!

Tobias leaves his work and comes running after him; he calls out, but August continues on his way. Tobias overtakes him and mentions the umbrella, mentions the fact that a certain umbrella is still standing where he left it the last time he called, a brand-new umbrella——

August continues on his way. At length he says: "I don't want it any more."

And in such wise had he made the presentation!

On the way home he began talking aloud to himself, began abusing the Gypsy Alexander: Left him cold with only a few hundred sheep in his flock! August's mistake had been in not shooting the fellow when he had had a chance—ho, if that wouldn't have brought joy to a certain lady he knew! The telegraph office was still open—he could halt the absconding rascal—that is, with the aid of the police and the authorities, and those were the devil and all to get mixed up with. Gammelmoderen could do it if she liked, but she would think twice before taking such steps. The Consul on his mother's behalf? He less than anyone else. . . . No, the Gypsy was free to continue north by steamer. . . .

August encounters the doctor bound on a sick-call.

"I was down to see those workmen of yours, August, but there didn't seem to be anyone of them with a knife wound in his chest."

"Hm," August replies. "No, they'd never admit it."

"But I looked them all over. You haven't got more than four men, have you?"

August replied with a long conversation to the effect that he had had twenty men working for him all summer, for what could a mere squad of four men accomplish or

such a big and exacting piece of road construction work——”

The doctor interrupts him. “Yes, but how many men have you now?”

“Five,” said August. “They’ve been working for the lawyer, but——”

“All right, all right! But who is the fifth? I must see him, too.”

August risks everything: “No, he’s up and around already now, it was nothing.”

“All right, that’s fine. For it’s no laughing matter to have a knife wound in one’s chest.”

August squirms. “Could he have bled internally?” he inquires.

“Yes, that too.”

“But, if he had, he couldn’t have gone on living day after day, could he?”

“You seem to be hiding something, August,” said the doctor. “It wasn’t you yourself that got into trouble with a knife by any chance?”

“Who, me——?”

“No, never mind! Who was it, then?”

August replied with a further long conversation, moral in nature, to the effect that it was swinish and inhuman of anyone to go around stabbing folk in the chest. His only regret was that he had not been present at the time, for he would have shot to kill——

“Hm, that would be pretty bad.”

“Ay, with this very hand you see here!” August threatened.

In order to conclude the interview, the doctor said: “You never come out to see us any more, August. We invited you at the time Paulina from Polden was here, but no. Is it because you’ve become so rich?”

“No——now doctor, how can you make such a joke as that! No, it’s just that I’m so tied up with business and

other matters—but it looks as though I'm through the thickest of it."

"Well, then come out and see us! Don't forget!"

August was glad when at last the doctor left him. He had been stricken with a sudden fear: what if Gammelmoderen were, after all, bleeding internally?

He found her looking much better and in a happier frame of mind; she had slept during the night and was now sitting up in bed. August heaved a sigh of relief, asked a few questions concerning the wound and listened to her answers: No, it wasn't paining any longer and she was now confident that she had suffered no internal hemorrhage. She had appeared somewhat astonished to see him, but now that his fears had been set aside, that ingenious head of his was quick to find an excuse for calling: did she think it would be worth while to set out the salmon net again? It was now late summer and the fish were already scarce—only one salmon in the past four days.

About such matters he would have to consult her son.

Oh, this was no matter to bother the Consul about, August felt. And the fact of the matter was, they no longer had a man for it—"The Gypsy—you know, that Alexander—he's gone."

This much at least he was able to report to the lady with a wound in her breast.

"Oh," she said. "You say he has gone?"

"Saturday night, by the north-bound." Significantly he established the time.

He could not detect from her expression whether or not she were rejoicing over this bit of news, and he immediately got back to the matter under discussion. "So I don't know what to do about the net," he said.

"Then I guess you'd better hang it up for all time," she said.

When August left her, he felt so blessedly relieved over her improvement that he even found himself thinking

more kindly of the Gypsy. He had not said that he had run away, merely that he had gone, and he had made no mention of the fact that he, August, had been cheated out of seven hundred *kroner*. Well, *had* he been cheated? How did he know! Alexander had, after all, sent him a formula for treating horses with colic and that ought to have some value. August did not know what a veterinarian would charge for such surgical services, but, he decided, were the occasion to arise when such a knife thrust would be necessary to save the life of some valuable stallion, no amount would seem enough.

Yes, the more he thought about the Gypsy the more he was obliged to exculpate him: what else could he have done but flee after that final act of his? And what else was there for him to do but to take the money he had in his pocket? Otherwise, what would he have had with which to buy himself something to eat during the next few weeks? And, under similar circumstances, would not August have done exactly the same thing? As though he wouldn't have! And, taking facts as they were, the Gypsy Alexander had gone about here in Segelfoss with a great secret in his bosom upon which he might have made big money. But he had never stooped to that level. Obviously he might have made something out of his relationship to Gammelmoderen and her son. But never had he stooped to that level. What the devil kind of business turnover and modern efficiency was that? August probably wondered to himself. He had no knowledge of life's complexities, but he had a faint conception of the type of honour and superiority which was part of this Gypsy's character. Without them, the fellow might not have kept his job on the place so long. Love and sex into the bargain—very well, but there was more, a personal something, a plus. He had taken no hush money from the house of Jensen—what money he made he came by as the result of honest and loyal services rendered. And he had kept his mouth

shut. Pride and honour in a rascal, a thief, a criminal? At all events, these were not virtues he had been born with—he had not acquired them from his race. Might it possibly be, in this instance, anything so incomprehensible as paternal feeling?

The devil and all if August didn't have cause to be sour on him, but even so, he was unable to get the fellow out of his thoughts. Alexander wasn't so bad. And if once, in the course of the summer, he had thought of heaving Druggist Holm over the edge of an abyss, the fellow could surely be said to have courage—he certainly could not be called a milksop. And in his love affair he had, in the end, given expression to the kind of knife play which was faintly reminiscent of South America. There was otherwise no trace of this art in Segelfoss and this August found boring indeed. In truth, the Gypsy was the only one who had offered him the slightest likelihood of a personal encounter and it had been for this reason that he had indulged in a bit of revolver practice at the upper end of the lake. Oh—if only August had had occasion to shoot the knife out of the hand of a man who was trying to make off with his wallet! What a thrill would not the children of the age have experienced whilst reading about that in all the papers!

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

ALL was going swimmingly.

August had taken a grip on himself and was busy again; no one should say of him that he was not master of his tender feelings. The day he saw the rowboat carted up to the lake he could feel he had accomplished no small matter. And in the evening, to be sure, he did snatch an opportunity to stroll out to South Parish, but that didn't mean anything; it was really something in the nature of a mistake. He suddenly found himself standing outside Tobias' house, but, as he met no one, saw no one in the window, he returned home. The devil and all if he would go seeking people out! If they had no need for him, he had no need for them—after all, a man is a man!

He happened to remember that Boldemand and his comrades were idle, so he sent for them and put them to work drilling holes and cementing into place the iron pickets at the two danger points along the new road. This meant another strenuous day for him, obliged as he was to lay out the lines to be followed and to remain the whole time with the men—though at the end of the day they had no more than made a beginning at the place up near the lodge. August was weary when quitting time came, but even so, he indulged in a little trip out to South Parish. With him he carried a package—only ten yards of edging lace such as ladies sew on their nightgowns—so in truth he was on urgent business. This time both Tobias and his wife came out to greet him and to invite him into the house, but, as Cornelia was not at home, August merely handed over the package with a word or two and left. A man is a man.

However, Hendrik was already dashing hither and yon on that new bicycle of his and had done no end of showing off for the neighbours. It was likewise a matter of common knowledge by this time that he was buying up sheep on August's account and, with that, his star had shot so far into the ascendancy that Benjamin's was left wholly in shadow. A regular little toiler, that Hendrik! He bought sheep and kept a level head on his shoulders, used up one thousand after another and in the end, August could see no reason for believing that the Gypsy had been a more efficient purchasing agent.

And, whatever could be the cause, Sunday came and in church no banns were uttered for Cornelia and Benjamin.

Yes, in truth it must be said that all was going swimmingly, unless one were to except the misfortune of Lawyer Pettersen, who had lost his mind, for in all other respects fate was kind indeed to the people of Segelfoss. August was a rich and highly respected man, the Consul had received a tremendous order from that keen little traveler of his down in Helgeland, Gammelmoderen was well again and was sitting up in bed, and the mountain was crawling with sheep. There was only that disaster to Lawyer Pettersen's mind.

When Druggist Holm stepped ashore from his journey south, he was alone. The fresh sea air had failed to cure the lawyer of his mental condition and he had simply grown queerer in the head as the ship sailed on. At Folla he expressed a desire to turn back—it seemed he had failed to bring with him the correct measurements for those armour plates he would need. They would have to be twice as large. The druggist suggested getting them twice as thick instead, but the lawyer would not hear of such a thing. And upon their arrival in Trondhjem the druggist had been obliged to leave him in good hands.

No sweeping changes came about in the community,

however, as the result of this unhappy circumstance; the man's wife was well provided for and his legal practice could just as well be taken over by the aged sheriff. Moreover, there was the guiding mind of the magistrate forever ready with sage advice. No, the lawyer's desuetude left no ill-effects other than an embarrassing situation with regard to that half-finished foundation for a new residence—what did Fru Pettersen want with a new house now, to say nothing of a bank with an armour-plate vault? It was immediately clear to her mind that she would have to move south to be near her husband. So the lot was put up for sale.

Of late the druggist had taken to visiting this lot; at all hours he was there, inspecting the cellar, the foundation walls as they stood, and every other feature—a noteworthy interest on his part. And when Gammelmoderen was up and about again, he even brought her there to see and together they would talk and nod, as though they had something in common. At length Vendt of the hotel joined them, and then there were three in the party. Vendt of the hotel was so blessed with ideas; without him the two others would have come to a sound agreement at the very start and thus been deprived of their delightfully frequent walks out to see the lot.

But there was another who was also displaying something of an interest in the lot—namely, Postmaster Hagen. But the visits of this gentleman were wholly secret in nature and he never brought his wife along. He might come late of an evening, measure the wall and take full stock of the surroundings, the background, the setting, note down a few figures and at length quit the place as surreptitiously as he had arrived. Now what in the world did the postmaster have in mind? He couldn't purchase the lot and put up a house there, could he? Hm, what could a postmaster at Segelfoss buy! Possibly later, were he to land a better position and earn a better income. But now——? The truth must have been that the artist

in him had suddenly discovered right there beneath his very nose a most fitting subject for his talent and he had lost no time in availing himself of the opportunity. For here were five lovely aspens and a brook. In the course of a dry summer, the brook would shrivel up until it was no more than a demure little trickle of water—a very infant of a brook—but the point was, it never dried up completely. And that meant that the five aspens might in time increase to many times their number—there might even be a little grove to sit in! And there was nothing in all the world more beautiful than aspens, bursting into bud in the springtime and continuing as objects of unfailing beauty throughout the summer with a mantle of silver upon them and a silken rustle to their foliage. There was no other tree in all Nordland which gave forth that silken sound and this came about from the fact that each leaf was as though fastened to the head of a pin and, on the slightest current of air, would tremble and brush its fellows. It was a miracle how these aspen leaves could vibrate and dance on the breeze without falling off, for it was really late autumn before they would begin turning yellow and falling to the ground, one leaf or many at a time, some spinning straight down, others fluttering hither and yon like dancing butterflies before coming to rest. . . . It was clear that Postmaster Hagen could have had no more than an esthetic interest in sketching the landscape, with a house and outbuildings there simply for effect. . . .

Druggist Holm had not been visiting the place much of late; it was as though he had pushed all thought of it from his mind. As it had been the intention of the Pettersens to put up a two-storey house, and as the cellar, already complete, covered quite some area, any building erected upon these foundations would necessarily have to be something of a mansion, as possibly the druggist had feared.

However, that was not the postmaster's conception: *his*

house was simply one long flowing storey, a masterpiece of beauty and proportion. But so secretively had he been working the whole time on his idea, it was amazing that on a certain evening he permitted himself to be surprised and caught with the dangerous sketch in his hand. And it was the druggist himself who had caught him.

"Good evening, Postmaster!" he said in greeting. "Glad to see some one who thinks he can afford to buy and build here! I had thought something of it myself, but I've given that up."

There was a solution to the problem in the opinion of the postmaster.

"You think so? A house of this width would have to be a two-storey affair, don't you think?"

They fell into conversation about the matter, and dashed if that stamp pedlar Hagen didn't really have an idea! He suggested a three-foot concrete "half-deck" over the cellar along the entire rear wall which would lie outside the floor plan of the house and which could serve very well as a terrace. The house would thus be a whole yard narrower and could consist of a single storey.

"The devil you say!" exclaimed the druggist.

Possibly he could understand it better from this ground plan, the postmaster suggested, and apologized for its general inadequacy. It was merely a thing he had been fussing about with to entertain himself.

Holm was unable to make out much from the ground plan. It was clear enough, but it was on such a wretchedly reduced scale. "But I'm obliged to figure on the drug-store and those who will live in the house," he said. "And here you have but one storey?"

Plenty of room! The postmaster had laid out the entire house, figured out the dimensions of each room, both large and small. And the druggist would see that he had not been stingy with space.

"Eight rooms!" cried Holm.

"Seven plus the kitchen. Is that too many? Two for your business and five for the occupants of the house. Or whatever you wish to use them for. The occupants will consist of, let us say, yourself, your pharmacist, your apprentice, your maid——"

"Phew! I didn't realize I had such a large family! I say, Postmaster, you're a magician! And do you even know what the house will look like when it's finished?"

"Old and familiar, un-modern and un-American in style. A home to dwell in—comfort! Built for comfort! A broad entrance in the middle of the house, rich mouldings on both sides of and above the double door. Stone slab steps. Tile roof and a fan light as wide as the door below. . . . Everything ancient and familiar and pleasing to the eye!"

"But the drugstore?" asked Holm. "I have a little business, you know."

"Gabled entrance here facing the town. Slab steps here, as well. A large porcelain sign plate announcing your business. I have here a little sketch," said the postmaster.

Druggist Holm gasped for air. "My, what a beautiful house! Do you know, it's charming. The aspens there, too—and the brook! Right in old style—beautiful!—yes, perfectly gorgeous!"

"But extremely sketchy. Just did it for fun, you know. I'm neither an architect nor a draughtsman, you understand."

"Yes, by Heaven, you are both!" vowed the druggist. "It wouldn't take so much to build, did you say?"

The postmaster produced a little estimate covering house and out-building. The devil of a fellow, that Hagen! He had thought of everything, even a conduit to bring water from the brook!

"With pleasure" he loaned the druggist his plans.

"There's someone I'd like to show them to," said the druggist. "To my pharmacist," he said. . . .

It appeared as though there were something pretty definite between Gammelmoderen and the druggist. They were less and less careful to conceal the moments they spent together and had again taken to visiting the building lot in each other's company, and there they now stood, pointing about in the plans and agreeing heartily over one thing or another. Possibly Holm was the less confident of the two. "The day will come when we'll have to explain our position," he said.

Gammelmoderen smiled at this. "I've already told Juliet," she said.

"You have? What did she say?"

"Juliet? Oh, she's so sensible."

"But what do you suppose the Consul will say?"

"He won't say anything. We are really so close, he and I. You may be certain that Gordon will be the first one to drink a glass with us when we return."

"I could use that glass right now—that one or another! Suppose you go down to the hotel and wait for me there!"

Holm had so many matters to arrange before their departure. He called on the pastor to pick up a few papers and he called on the magistrate to offer a reasonable price for Pettersen's lot. On his way back he met August and halted him with a cry of joy: "Hey, there, the very man I wanted to see!"

Oh yes, August is always in great demand. . . .

He was just returning home after a most enjoyable visit with the doctor and his wife. He had been in high feather and had given free play to his tongue, for none other than little Esther had been his audience; moreover, he was now rich and no longer bowed down and he could afford to swagger a bit and spin a yarn or two. The doctor, as was to be expected, had inquired about his sheep business and August had reported an enormous upswing—he had already worn out one purchasing agent

and had taken on a new one to fill his place and he was at that very moment in need of help in that office of his in town—such a mighty mass of sheep as he had—both mutton sheep and shear sheep—no laughing matter! But he was not alone interested in these paltry few thousands of sheep, he said; he was likewise interested in a few farms he found he would have to buy—not many, only a few small estates, ten in all, in the event that things were to turn out as he hoped where a certain person was concerned——

“Where are the boys?” asked the doctor, softly.

“I don’t know,” replied his wife.

“Yes, that’s a mighty enterprise of yours there, August!” said the doctor. “And here I’ve just crippled myself buying a mere motorcycle.”

“But there’s quite a difference between that and science and medicine and doctoring and all that!”

“But ten farms!”

“I’ve promised them,” said August.—After all, they didn’t amount to so much; landed estates thereabouts had no great worth. The eye was deceptive. He had been accustomed to other things abroad—fruit farms and cattle ranges like nothing this part of the world had ever seen.—“They are like those you read about in fairy tales,” he added.

“I can’t understand what’s become of the boys, can you, Esther?”

“No,” Fru Esther replies. Oh, her first thought is no longer for those boys of hers now—she is interested in what August is saying and is anxious to hear more.

The doctor turns to August again. He must have got rid of a devil of a lot of money by this time, he supposed?

Oh yes. He had paid out some money, and that was not to be denied. But he had got value in return for it. There now, for example, was a mountain literally loaded down with sheep.

But then the day would come when he'd have to borrow on that value?

August felt himself compelled to smile at such a puerile question. Yes, of course. But what else did the world in general do but borrow and loan on recognized value? It was this which constituted business enterprise and capital turnover.

No, the doctor was unable to comprehend. It was too deep for him.

"But why must you always understand everything, Karsten?" asked his wife, somewhat impatiently.

August is off at a gallop: No, this little business of his was nothing when compared with the enterprises with which such magnates as that Rockefeller and that Rothschild were wrestling. The doctor ought to have seen the sheep farms, the seining outfits and the fisheries operated by those two gentlemen! Pardon him if they didn't have private graveyards just for their own families and servants and office secretaries! August had once called upon that Rothschild and there was one interview he'd never forget.—"Why, Lord bless your soul!" he said. "There were a hundred and fifty men with revolvers in their hands standing there to guard the doors!"

"But you got past them all right, I suppose?"

"No, they didn't bother me any," said August. "I had seen more dangerous warriors and brigands than those lads, and, you see, I had a revolver myself. So if any of them had started in shooting they wouldn't have lived to grow old. No, they were honest fellows, and it was only that they had a lot of gold and were trying to show off. But I had met both big admirals and generals before, so I wasn't impressed by the likes of them. What was my business? they asked me. 'I'll tell that to that chief of yours,' I said. Ay, so they took me to their chief and he was fixed up even grander than they were, with feathers and pearls all over him. But I had seen both presidents

and kings before and I didn't think much of him. 'What do you want with that Rothschild?' he asked me. 'I want to sell him a big diamond I got down in a country called Peru,' I said."

"Was that true?" asked the doctor.

August, with a trace of annoyance: "Was it true! Say, I'm always pretty sure before I make a statement! And besides, I couldn't very well go to that Rothschild with stuff I had made up, could I?"

"Did they let you in?"

"Naturally. I walked right in to see the man, bowed and told him what I wanted. And a stately fellow he was to talk to, too, just like any other officer of the crown. 'Let me see that diamond!' he said to me. Ay, and he bought it right there on the spot. He wasn't a fellow to beat me down on my price, he just took out his wallet and paid me. And you can imagine what kind of a wallet he had, too! If we took and stuffed our own wallets with newspapers along with five or six decks of cards, even then they wouldn't be as thick as the one that Rothschild had."

"But I suppose it shrank considerably after he had paid you for the diamond?"

August bit at this: "Ay, that it did. It shriveled up to nothing at all. For it was a thumping sum of money he paid me."

"How much could such a diamond be worth?"

"Oh," said August, slowly. "Oh, to tell the truth, I couldn't exactly say. All I know is that the money I got for that diamond is enough to take care of me in my old age."

"Oh, so this isn't the money you won in a lottery?"

"Certainly not!" said August, spurning the notion. "What would that be to take up in the mountains and start a tremendous sheep ranch with?"

At this point the doctor gets up and goes to the door

to see if he can locate his sons. "I'm beginning to feel a bit anxious," he said. "How about you, Esther?"

"Yes," answered Fru Esther, absently.

There sat Esther from Polden listening to one of August's cock-and-bull stories. She, too, might have been longing for her sons to be present to hear it, but she was too deeply interested herself and refused to go out and look for them lest she miss a word. Was she such a human nonentity then, so utterly fatuous? No, she was by no means a nonentity. She was beautiful and charming and these were positive qualities. And she was capable in so many ways—capable in the kitchen and in the house and in the cellar, and capable she was in the bedroom. Esther? Blind, sweet and wild in a bedroom. But there she now sat. No one in the world could tell such fabulous stories as that landsman of hers from Polden. It is possible that she didn't believe a word he uttered, but isn't it true that folk also read fairy tales without having to believe them? August's words were different from others she had to listen to. What did she hear from the girls in the kitchen? What did even the doctor have to entertain her with? Compared with August's magnificent untruths, mere truth was dry and tedious.

As for August himself, there he sat with plenty of wind in his sails. He had been in excellent spirits all day; the air was bright and invigorating and all was going swimmingly: much money had gone out and many sheep had come in, he had the best of hopes for a certain young lady in South Parish, he enjoyed the respect of one and all, and his clothes were lined with silk. And it was Esther for whom his tongue was wagging; he would not have opened his mouth for another, for no other person could listen as she did, her face tense with excitement, her breast held high. A story was a story for her; never did her mind demand less exaggeration, less use of the miraculous—in the huts back home in Polden folk knew about such things

as Bileal's Comet and the girl who jumped in the sea. Oh, on those long winter evenings, how full those huts in Polden had been of tales and songs of mystery. . . .

"Ay, and it's all the world you've seen, you August!" said little Esther. "And such fun as it is to listen to you. I mind the day when you were home in Polden, how much you found to do, how much you started and arranged for."

"Polden?" said August. "No, that wasn't anything. But it was too bad about the lawyer here losing his wits and all. He was after me to form a company with him and open up a bank here in town. That would have been easy for me, too, for I know all about banks and the like."

"Ay, but August, you've already so much in your hands! I can't make out how you can take care of as many things as you do!"

"I'm used to it," he said.

There they sat alone, those two, with no one to look out for, with no one to watch their speech. Fru Esther became talkative at once. She had long since had nothing to complain about, but August was so pleasant to talk with, and they were two old friends from Polden.

"Ay, and everything is well with you now, I suppose?" he asked.

Yes, she supposed that was true. Not exactly as well as right after the doctor had come home from Trondhjem, but that was not to be expected.

August surmised from her tone that their great joy and passion had cooled considerably, whatever the reason might be. He said: "So I hear the doctor's got him a motorcycle?"

Yes, so he had. But there was nothing grand about that; no great blessing had been visited upon the house as a result of that. And in thus wise were things tending, more and more. He never spoke of that blemish of his any more now, he never repeated that it was strange she still

wanted him for her husband even though he had a glass eye in his head. But then, what other remark could she have made, aside from that already tiresome one that she'd have had him even if he were blind? No, he had grown accustomed to having but one eye now and had come to regard himself as perfect as ever before.

"Ay, isn't that the way things go!" said August, simply to put in a word.

And now he had got that motorcycle of his and his desire was that she should be anxious about him whenever he went out with it. But was there anything dangerous about riding a motorcycle?

"I should say not!" snorted August. "It's only that he's a coward."

Yes, but was that any reason why she should sit up and worry about him? But that was what he wanted, it seemed. And then she had been told she was not to go to the Segelfoss Store and trade with a certain clerk—the one with the curly hair. No, he simply wouldn't stand for it. And then on another occasion she had met the magistrate's new secretary on the street, and he had put his foot down on that, as well.

"Isn't it just as I say!" exclaimed August. "I know a lot of people put together like that. But that's nothing for you to worry about."

You see, she didn't have many to talk to and visit with, God knew, so he really might have forgiven her these incidents, but he was so quick to judge. They hadn't gone off into any bushes together or put their arms around each other, for such would have been both a sin and an act of shame and such had never happened. But that was the way he was. And even though he had that glass eye which he had to take out and wash, she had always taken pains to praise it and say that it was in every way as pretty as his own eye. For he had always said that it was her fault he had got it and thus become disfigured for the rest of

his days, so the least thing she could do would be to regret it. And yes, it was true what he said, for it had been she herself who had sent for Aase that time, so the fault was really hers. And it was the same thing with the motorcycle: he would keep on repeating that she didn't care what happened to him out on the roads and that she would even be glad if he were to lose the other eye as well. Now hadn't that been an abominable thing to say?

"You wouldn't want me to talk to him, would you?" asked August.

"No no no!" she cried in alarm. "No, you must never mention a word to him or even give out that you have noticed anything!"

"For that would be the least of my tricks!"

"Yes, but that would be quite out of the question, for that would only make things worse afterward. And things really aren't so bad, after all. He's good to me, too, sometimes, and says: 'You and me, Esther, you know!' Oh, if only he'd let me get in a family way and have a little girl, I'd never say a word!"

"He won't let you, did you say? As though he could stop you!"

"Hm, that's what you say! For some years ago he refused to have any children and now he doesn't want us to have more. It would be such fun for me to have a little girl or even two, beside the boys. But he doesn't want me to. Ay, and I've always done everything to please him just as I'm supposed to do."

August can stand to hear no more. "You're not *supposed* to do anything!" he shouts. "There's just one thing you're supposed to do and that's to get in a family way! Who ever heard of such a thing! Isn't it the way of the world and the Lord's own commandment that we shall multiply and replenish the earth! What was that thing He said to the Jews and the rest of us anyway! . . . Don't you know how to work it?" he asked, more quietly.

"Oh yes, I know!" said Fru Esther, taking heart. "And I've thought so often of disobeying him, but I've never dared. He ought to know that."

"Know what? What of it? It'll be too late when he knows it, won't it? Let him jabber away all day long, it'll all be just too late."

"Do you know what, August——" says Fru Esther suddenly—"now that you mention it, it doesn't seem to me to be such a serious matter, after all, and that's just what I'm going to do next time."

They sat there talking the matter over pleasantly together when the doctor returned. He had not found the boys.

"That's too bad," said August, rising from his chair. "Then I won't be seeing the little fellows this time."

"What's your hurry? Can't you sit a while longer?"

"I've been sitting here too long as it is. I really just stopped in on my way to the telegraph office. It's about that sloop of the Consul's—I'm getting an engine for it."

"For the sloop?"

"Ay, one of the same kind of engines as that Vanderbilt uses on those fish sloops of his."

He was pleased with himself upon leaving the doctor's house, pleased because he had been ready with a word of advice for Fru Esther in her hour of need. Such a husband as she had! He'd better have a care!

It is at this point that Druggist Holm captures him.

"It just so happens," says the druggist, "that I have become the owner of that building lot of the lawyer's. What do you say to that?"

"Glad to hear it. Are you going to build?"

"Yes, if I can get those masons of yours to complete the foundation for me. What do you think?"

"There might be a way for that."

"Ah," said Holm, "if you aren't the man to have on

one's side! Have you time to step down to the hotel with me? There's some one there who will be more than pleased to see you."

They arrived at the hotel together and August was warmly received—Gammelmoderen cried out as soon as she saw him: "How splendid of you to come, Altmulig!"

"Well, I bought the lot!" said Holm.

"Skoal!" said Vendt.

"And August is going to lend me those masons of his!"

"Of course he is," said Gammelmoderen. "He's always so splendid to ask a favour of!"

There she sat with something special about the way she was dressed. August realized from one thing or another that something was afoot. However, he asked no questions. He glanced over the postmaster's plans, nodded to the general idea but shook his head when he came to the question of that so-called "half-deck." Oh, August was no tyro in the field of building houses; he had both poured walls and built houses long years before, and he regarded this "half-deck" arrangement as anything but a practical solution to the problem at hand, for there would have to be a row of pillars to support it.

"What shall we do, then?" asked Holm.

"Knock down the rear cellar wall and set up another three feet further in. The materials are there; the only cost will be labour. But you'd also have to figure on labour cost to lay on that half deck supported by pillars. It's as broad as it is long, when it comes to that."

"I see. However, I shouldn't like to change anything and run the risk of offending the postmaster."

Ho, August had a way out of that situation: it would take the men only a few hours to knock out the rear wall and then, when the postmaster arrived on the scene, it could be said that the masons had been stupid and had misunderstood the plans! August did not smile; he was practical enough to desire not to tread on anyone's toes.

The postmaster's plans for a one-storey house would be unaffected, all the dimensions would be his, the other three cellar walls would remain intact.

Holm bowed to August's superior knowledge and Gammelmoderen simply sat there and was proud of Altmulig.

"We won't go down till we hear the whistle——" said Vendt. "Oh, the devil, why didn't I say it before——! But even so we'll have plenty of time to finish our drinks."

On their way down to the pier it became clear to August that they were not merely to meet the steamer—they were actually taking the ship! Still he asked no questions, did not even inquire after the wound in Gammelmoderen's breast, as she appeared to have recovered entirely. When Holm hinted about being somewhat nervous and uneasy, she laughingly replied: "No, why so? Let them be shocked! And if there are signs of consternation after we have left, you can be sure that Altmulig will explain the situation."

Fru Juliet has come down to the steamer and has stationed herself some distance off to one side. She did not come by motor down to the pier; without regard for her condition, she had come all the way from the Manor on foot lest she arouse any undue suspicion. When the two ladies spy each other, Gammelmoderen clasps her hands over her breast and appears quite overcome. Then both smile at each other and nod back and forth many times.

The Consul makes his routine appearance. "What's this!" he exclaims. "You here, Juliet?"

"Yes, the weather seemed so fine."

"Exceedingly incautious of you, my dear. Mother's here too, I observe. Are you down here with someone that's leaving?"

"Yes, your mother is by all means with someone that's leaving."

The ship threw off the mail and was ready to cast off at once. No incoming freight from the north and no ship-

ments of salmon for the south this time. Suddenly Gammelmoderen is seen to step aboard and disappear down into the saloon. In a few moments two gentlemen follow her aboard.

The Consul becomes aware of August's presence and signals to him. Offering the excuse that he is frightfully busy, he asks August to drive the ladies home. Oh, but the Consul could hardly be said to be really busy; it was only that he had wished to let those aboard hear that he had a chauffeur. "I say, Altmulig!" he called out. "You may drive the ladies home! Hm—where did mother disappear to?"

"She went aboard, I believe," replies Fru Juliet.

"Aboard? Yes, but they've taken in the gangplank, haven't they? Is she sailing?"

"I believe so."

"Altmulig, did she say anything to you about this?"

August mumbles: "Just for a little trip—it wasn't anything——"

"All right, then. Come, Juliet," said the Consul. "I believe I'll drive you home myself. Coming along, Altmulig?"

"Thanks, I've a matter of business. I must take a run out to South Parish. I've a man to see."

CHAPTER TWENTY-NINE

AND now a number of things happened in rapid succession.

Possibly Fru Juliet's walk had been none too good for her; toward morning the little lady began developing queer symptoms and by sun-up she had become a mother for the fifth time. Yes, at last the third little girl had arrived.

"That's the way it goes!" said August when he learned of the event. And thereafter he made divers references both to the blessings of the Lord and to the blossoms of a flower garden.

But the Consul, he stole into the room in his stocking-feet to have a peep at mother and daughter and to ask an endless series of questions. He was so solicitous of his wife's condition, and he sat down on the edge of the bed and was deeply touched. "Yes, Juliet, you surely are a prize!" he said—the exact words he had used on each of the four previous occasions. And he told her that he had just received a letter from that English gentleman saying that he would arrive in a week or thereabouts. "So I don't know what we are going to do," said the Consul.

"What do you mean?" asked his wife.

"Now that you're laid up, I mean."

"Haha!"

"It's no laughing matter. On the contrary, I'm in something of a tight place."

"Can I help that!"

"Yes, you knew he was coming, didn't you!"

"Haha! You mustn't make me laugh—it will wake her up!"

And to make matters worse, Gammelmoderen was now away. "Where the devil did mother go just at this time?" he asked. "And that miserable Altmulig appeared to know something about it, too, but he wouldn't come out with it. You must all be crazy!"

They decided to wire for Marna who was staying with her sister, Fru Knoff of Helgeland. "However, I can't see how that will be necessary," said Fru Juliet. "In a week I'll be up and about and as good as ever."

Here he began to growl again, saying that what she wanted was to have the Englishman all to herself, and again she was forced to laugh. Oh, she was so languid, she laughed at everything.

"You might at least allow Marna this opportunity!" he said.

"Haha! Go away, Gordon! If you don't, I'll ring!"

Very well, Gordon went away, went down to his office. And now he suddenly found himself actually busy. That afternoon Banker-Editor Davidsen called upon him with the keys to the bank and said that he had come to resign.

Resign!

The Consul laid his pen aside and was, as usual, the perfect gentleman of the English school: "Resign, did you say?"

"Yes, right here and now! Not another day of it!"

"Won't you sit down, Herr Davidsen! What seems to be the trouble?"

"August," said Davidsen. "That sheep business of his."

"Yes?" said the Consul and waited. "Yes, that sheep business?"

"For I refuse to pay out another *krone* on that bank-book of his."

"No, there's much to be said for that."

"He came back to me again today for more money—thousands!" Davidsen declared. "I explained to him the matter of his balance, but he merely smiled at that and

answered: 'It may look even worse soon for I've just telegraphed for an engine to put in the sloop.' "

"My sloop?" said the Consul, raising his eyebrows. "I haven't instructed him to do anything of the sort."

"I gave him a thousand," said Davidsen, "but he became offended at that and said that a thousand was nothing. 'All right, but not another *øre* shall you have today, my good sir,' I said. 'And tomorrow I shan't be here,' I said."

"Has he overdrawn?" asked the Consul.

"No, but he's getting down pretty near the line. He has only a few thousand left."

"Yes, the situation is undeniably tragic."

"You don't know how deeply I regret that notice I published in the paper about his pasturage," said Davidsen. "For no doubt that has encouraged him into purchasing sheep beyond all common sense. I don't know."

The Consul was not inclined to look on the dark side of the matter. "He's really a brilliant chap," he said, "so God knows what he's up to with all those sheep up there. And, after all, the money he's spending is his."

Davidsen, with determination: "Not another *øre* shall he receive from me!"

"It won't help matters simply to allow another to give it to him."

"No. But I lack the conscience to go on."

The Consul thought the matter over long and carefully, blinked his eyes and studied the thing out in his mind. "Yes, but it can't be your meaning to quit the bank permanently, can it?"

"That is exactly my meaning, yes," said Davidsen. "You have not misunderstood me there, Herr Consul. I have laid the keys on your desk."

The Consul studied the problem further. "You are throwing away a splendid income for yourself and family, Herr Davidsen."

"I know it," said Davidsen.

"A matter of thousands."

"Yes. But I'm unsuited to the post and those at home have long been cognizant of the fact. Oh, they've had a few clothes during the time I've put in at the bank, so they are perfectly well satisfied. We are in no dire need, we are a contented family."

The Consul weighed the question in his mind for the third time, and at length he realized that he would get nowhere with Davidsen. "Well, in any event, I am not the proper person to receive these keys," he said. "I have nothing to do with them. The magistrate happens to be the chairman of the board."

"That's true," said Davidsen. "But I took on this work with the distinct understanding that I could walk out the very moment I found myself incapable of going on. And it is now my wish to leave these keys in your hands so that I can walk out of your office a free man again. My only regret is that you have had to waste so much of your valuable time trying to acquaint me with a practice from which I have derived no satisfaction——"

He sounded more than ever like that paper of his, the Consul mused after Davidsen had left him. A remarkable man, for all that, and a remarkable family, too. Here he was going about in the modern age with a little inner voice which spoke to him, with a little antique curio inside his brain—a thing called conscience. They had got a few clothes and were contented. The Consul had learned nothing like that in all those foreign schools of his, but the thing none the less appeared to him in terms of startling reality. His mind kept feeding on this point: Gad, if he hadn't run up against a man who was actually pure and good of heart! And, both as a gentleman and as a human being, he felt a huge respect for purity and goodness of heart. Wonder if Juliet couldn't pick out something for Fru Davidsen, he mused. Not discarded wearing apparel,

of course, but something from stock in the store, something in the way of a winter dress . . . won't you please . . . with our compliments. . . .

But Gad—he would certainly find himself pestered by Altmulig on the morrow! The wonder was he hadn't been around already! Gordon Tidemand was a great man and a fine gentleman and all that, but he disliked all forms of personal friction and dreaded anything resembling a scene. Were Altmulig to come to him on the following day with a complaint about Davidsen, the Consul would surely find himself wishing he were dead and buried. . . .

And about those keys there on the desk—what was he going to do with them? Annoyed—just to think, the Consul!—yes, downright irritated, he snatched up the keys and carried them out to the car, placed them in the rear seat and drove them over to the magistrate's, exactly as though they had been passengers.

A situation had arisen, the consequences of which now spread in all directions.

The Consul made the first move and himself paid a visit to August. Feigning great pressure of affairs, he spoke rapidly and uttered but a few terse words: the Englishman was now on his way to them. Would those fences along the road be finished inside of a week's time?

"We're working on them," August replied.

"Yes, but will they be ready in a week?"

"We'll do our best."

"Good!" said the Consul and left. His interview had been successful, he had sidetracked August's complaint.

But August was likewise soon given something to think about. Jørn Mathildesen came rushing down from the mountain with an important message. . . . No, there had been no wolves, and no sheep had become wedged in a cleft of rock or fallen down over a bluff—nothing of this

order, and yet—Jørn Mathildesen would not take the responsibility of receiving another sheep.

August's eyes were popping.

Jørn would like nothing better, as God was his witness, but it would be absolutely out of the question to feed any more sheep on the mountain after today. That Valborg had sent him down with this message, and that Valborg, she had taken care of animals ever since the days she was small. But soon now the flocks would be spreading out over the whole seven miles of the moorland and the sheep which were coming in today were thin and under-fed and would be needing what forage was left. So August must forgive him for coming to him with such a piece of bad news, but . . .

August thought for a long time, then asked: "Have you fifty score sheep up there yet?"

"Seven-and-fifty score missing three," Jørn reported.

August nodded. "All right then, we'll quit."

"Oh, then there won't be any more?"

"No."

"I knew it!" Jørn exclaimed. "If only I could get to talk with you!"

"Ay, for we've no other way out of the mess," August admitted. And quite successfully he created the impression that he was simply furious with the way things had turned out; he threw his head around, sighed and clutched his breast. Deep down inside, however, he was anything but displeased to be able so gracefully to call a halt to his purchasing campaign. He had over a thousand head now—in actual figures, one thousand one hundred thirty-seven, but well over two thousand for conversational purposes. Such a flock would be regarded as a sheer fairy tale throughout the length and breadth of Nordland. Coldevin had hardly owned that many sheep and Willatz Holmsen had had well under two thousand head. Moreover, what

else could he do but give in? The mountain was too small for him, it had been poorly constructed in the beginning for an enterprise on such a grand scale. A mere seven miles of moorland! Ugh, what did that amount to compared with a seventy-five mile stretch of prairie! And this was not all: yesterday Banker Davidsen had given him a statement of his account which had been none too encouraging, and the money he had in his wallet consisted of no more than a single scrawny thousand. Yes, as he had said, he had no other way out of the mess than to call off all future purchasing.

But wasn't it likely that Dame Fortune would again smile upon him, as it was printed on his lottery tickets! Why, he had the best chances in the world there. . . .

"Ay, so that's all you had to say then, Jørn?"

"That's all. So we won't be getting any more sheep, then?"

August shook his head and went his way.

Yes, of course, he would call a halt at once. Why the devil had that good Hendrik gone on buying up seven score sheep after he had passed the thousand mark—that is, the two thousand mark? Those seven score did nothing to help a round number and thus represented but money thrown away.

So wouldn't it be wise for him to saunter out to South Parish immediately? Out of the question! He was not as hard up as all that, the devil and all if he was! Oh, August was hardly crippled! His first act was to determine the postmaster's office hours, after which he hastened up the new road to his workmen. They were busy drilling holes, slow work—as the pickets, beautifully pointed at the end, were two inches in diameter, the holes would have to correspond.

"Can you get these fences up in a week?" asked August.

"We're working as fast as we can," replied Boldemand.

"Will you be finished in a week?" repeated August.

Boldemand and his comrades thought the matter over, talked it over amongst themselves, debated several points, at length reached a decision. "That will be pretty hard," they said.

"The Consul wants it finished in a week," said August. "He's expecting a lord from England to come here and visit him."

"We wouldn't dare to promise it," they replied. "There's a Sunday coming between."

"And if you should work overtime at double pay?"

"We might be able to do it like that," they replied.

"Then we'll leave it that way. But here's another important matter," said August. "I want that rear wall of the lawyer's cellar torn out."

"Hm," they said. "Buttonhead's cellar wall, eh? Is he going to pay now?"

"Ay, the druggist has bought the lot and he'll pay, you needn't worry about that."

What, the druggist? they cried. So he'd bought the lot, had he? When was that? There's a remarkable fellow, that druggist! There's one man in a million! Oh, so he's bought the lot! More than once they had stopped in to see him at the drugstore and he had helped them out. "Didn't you get two bottles out of him one time, Boldemand?"

"I could have got four!" answered Boldemand.

August: "Can you rip out that wall this afternoon between three and six?"

They shook their heads at this: Three hours?—No.

"Can you rip it out in five hours?"

They might be able to do it in that time.

"Good," said August. "Tomorrow between eight and one, then!"

Why just then? they asked.

"That's not for you to know," answered August. "But between eight and one is the time. Have you got that?"

Oh yes, they had understood their schedule and all that, and they would have to work like slaves to accomplish the work in five hours, but the cellar wall had perhaps not set to stone as yet, and that would help a good bit. They talked and they talked and they talked. And the fact of the matter was there wasn't a thing in the world they wouldn't do for the druggist, such a special man, such a stately fellow as he was. . . .

August went to South Parish. On business, as usual, however. He had news for them there; fate had stepped in and called a halt to his activities. And now he would crave an answer; she need not wonder at that, considering how long he had been waiting.

Again both Tobias and his wife stepped outside to invite him into the house, and again Cornelia was not at home. The lad Mattis reported that he had seen Cornelia a short time before up at the neighbouring farm and that Hendrik was teaching her to ride a bicycle.

Aha! August was pleased to hear this, for it indicated that she had turned her nose from Benjamin. He handed Mattis a *krone* and said: "Go get them!"

Some time passed before the pair appeared and August meanwhile merely sat there in silence, his hands resting upon his cane. Far be it from him to squander his news upon two old people. Hendrik came pedaling into the yard with Cornelia riding on behind. How they were abusing that splendid new machine! Two grown-up people riding on one bicycle over a hummocky road! But August would certainly not be the one to mention the fact—little Cornelia, she was so thin and light, had really never had enough to eat in her life.

"I was waiting to see you at home, Hendrik," he said.

"Why so?" asked Hendrik. "I've money enough to last me through tomorrow."

"But couldn't you imagine that I might have other orders to give you!"—August turned to Cornelia and inquired if she enjoyed riding a wheel.

"Ay," she replied. "It was loads of fun. And that Hendrik, such a one as he is to give lessons!"

"You shall have a girl's wheel," he said. "Now what do I get for it?"

"I haven't anything to give you for it."

"Have you thought over that matter I was talking to you about the last time I was here?"

"He wasn't talking to me about anything, Hendrik, do you hear!" she said, with face aflame.

What the devil did Hendrik have to do with it? Oh, but weren't those two sitting there making eyes at each other, and Hendrik in a new coat and all? The devil and all if he didn't seem to have recovered his standing with Cornelia—that new wheel of his, and his imposing new position as purchasing agent for August's sheep enterprise had apparently carried some weight with her. At least, it looked very much like that.

August suddenly came out with the news. "I'm buying no more sheep, Hendrik!" he said.

All gaped at him and Hendrik exclaimed: "What's that?"

"Ay, so you thought it would go on forever, did you? Well, it's all over now, you see."

"Hm!" said Tobias. "Why can that be? Excuse me for asking."

"It seems," said August, "that there isn't enough grass on the mountain for any more sheep. That Jørn Mathildesen and that Valborg, they've been down to tell me about it. They can't take on another sheep, they tell me."

"My, isn't that a shame!" complained Tobias, speaking for himself.

August gave vent to a thorough disgust with the mountain, literally gave the mountain blue blazes. A dungheap of a mountain, a mere manure pile! Seven miserable miles of moorland! No more than you could hold in your lap! Enough for a few puny sheep, but what good did that do! No, he should never have given up his Hardanger

moor! Down there he had had thirty thousand head. The moor there had been fifty miles long and he had had a shepherd for every mile!

Oh, August and those grand figures of his again! They went completely over the heads of everyone present and disconsolately Hendrik asked: "So I'm not to buy up any more sheep?"

"No, that's what you heard, isn't it! And those reptiles you sent up yesterday were no more than skin and bones. You didn't do so well when you bought those."

Cornelia puts in a word for him. "That Hendrik, he can't very well look over every sheep he buys," she says.

"You're getting pretty thick with that Hendrik again, aren't you!" said August, causing her once more to blush furiously.

How everything seemed to dislocate itself and twist itself out of shape for August! Weren't those two sitting there as good as making love to each other right there under his very nose! "Come, Mattis, let me hear how much music you've learned by this time," he said simply to hold himself together.

But no, Mattis had learned not a thing. Nevertheless, he brought out the accordion and laid it in August's lap. A clever ruse to get him to play! . . . But was he in any mood for music? Had he recently been the recipient of a great burning joy or an embrace? . . . He laid his cane on the table and began fingering the keys. He had been a master in his day; but here were so many buttons and keys to press and his fingers were stiff with age. Then suddenly at his wits' end and in utter desperation, he strikes up with the song about the girl who jumped in the sea. More, he undertakes to sing the words!

Again all sat with mouth agape. They had not expected this; they really had not expected anything at all, least of all that he should sing. But there he had burst into song!

If only he had not attempted to use his voice! It was not that he was spoiling the song itself, merely that the total effect was not pleasing. He was an old man, a caricature, and his mustache was quivering so helplessly.

The others appeared somewhat embarrassed whilst he, with pathetic and soul-stirring emotion, played through the lengthy stanzas, striving ever for polyphonic effect, filling in each interval between verses with his most fetching chords, an art for which he had once been noted. But an old man singing, that mustache of his, those eyes of washed-out blue, his whole appearance——!

Cornelia, in desperation, picked up his cane from the table, ran it through her fingers a time or two and at length laid it across her knees as she sat there. August noted this and was stimulated at once. Hm, there she sat fondling his cane, her eyes resting fair upon it. . . . Was she trying, then, to conceal how deeply she was moved? It could not be possible that she knew the song, for it dated back several generations and had last been sung and hummed throughout the province of Salten some thirty years ago and today it was dead. Ah, but she could hear the words, couldn't she? These were not to be misunderstood.

Coming to the place where the girl jumped, August revealed himself as the true artist he was. He had seen and heard many things in his lifetime and he had a talent for effect; therefore at this point, he indulged in the theatrical gesture of stopping short and resting throughout an entire measure. This unexpected and seemingly endless period of silence was to give the effect of the girl going to the bottom. After which he played a series of slow lugubrious chords and brought the song to a conclusion.

"Here, take this thing away!" he said, handing the instrument to Mattis. His fingers were tired and sore. Turning to Cornelia, he said: "Would you like that cane of mine?"

She could not have been so deeply moved by the music, for she laughed at once and said: "Good Heavens, no! What do I want with it!"

"No?" he said.

"That was a pretty thing you played there."

"Did you like it?"

"Ay, it was the prettiest thing I ever heard," said Tobias, adding his own opinion. Meanwhile, his wife was wagging her head and chattering away: "My my! Oh my! We've never heard anything like it!" And here again the old people were holding him up and doing their best to recommend him. Their efforts seemed lost upon their daughter, however, for if she wasn't sitting there picking straws from Hendrik's splendid new coat!

"That's nothing to what I can do on the piano!" said August. "For when I play the piano I always use notes."

"Ay, that's the way it is when a man has a genius for music!" nodded Tobias.

August continued: "Nights when I couldn't go to sleep on account of all the things I had on my mind, many's the time I've sat down and played the piano until day-break."

"Can't you sleep nights?" asked Tobias.

"No, very seldom. I've told you, Cornelia, how things are with me."

She started up as though she had been stuck with a pin. "I don't remember anything about it," she said. "Now, Hendrik, you must come out and steady me a bit again. Then I'll be able to ride, you'll see."

What, bicycle practice now? That crazy young one! Didn't she ever have a serious thought in her head?

"Hm!" August said holding out his hand to Hendrik. "Let me see the papers covering those last purchases of yours."

Hendrik fumbled a bit in the pocket of his new coat,

but he managed to locate the papers and laid them in August's hand. August, in turn, adjusted his glasses and glanced over the records, jotted down some figures and struck a total. Then he held out his hand again and this time asked for the money, the cash balance. Hendrik drew out a package done up in wrapping paper and, no mistake, there was the money as well. Cornelia, with a tense expression on her face, was following every move.

August counted the money.

"Ay, and there are some small bills, too," said Hendrik digging into his trousers pocket.

"Rubbish!" said August. "I have no use for small change in my business! And here now is your pay. Count it over!"

"But you gave me more than my pay when I began," said Hendrik.

"Count that money, I told you!"

Oh-ho, so that was it! They should learn that orders were orders!

But Hendrik was a clean little lad, for all that, and when he came and gave August his hand in thanks, August could not help feeling some compassion for him. Now that Hendrik had lost his secretarial position and his steady wage, Benjamin of North Parish would gain the inside track again. It appeared that Cornelia was already changing her mind as she sat there; no longer was she hunting for straws on Hendrik's new coat.

"Hm!" August repeated. "But I have another job for you, Hendrik. I have so many jobs to give out. You'll hear from me."

"If only I might!" said Hendrik, wistfully.

"I don't suppose you know any foreign languages?"

"Foreign languages? No."

"Well, that's too bad. I know four myself," said August.

Tobias wagged his head and was overwhelmed.

"I could sit here talking foreign languages for three weeks at a stretch," said August.

"Folk who are folk know everything!" said Tobias.

"So that means you won't have a place for me?" asked Hendrik, disconsolately.

"Didn't I say you'd hear from me!" bellowed August.

"I believe you can rely upon my word!"

"Excuse me, sir!" Hendrik apologized.

"It happens," explained August, "that we are to have a grand Englishman, a lord, to visit us up at the Manor and he'll be here within the week. He's to hunt and fish for trout and be our guest at the Manor. Serving him will not be hard or unpleasant work for you, Hendrik—your job will be simply to go about with him and carry his shotgun, his walking stick and that meerschaum pipe of his."

"But I wouldn't be able to talk to him or understand what he says, would I?"

"I'll teach you the most important words in no time—I wanted to teach you, too, Cornelia, but you refused!"

"Aren't you ashamed!" said her mother.

"She's such a silly goose sometimes," her father remarks apologetically.

"So that will be a mighty fine post for you, Hendrik," continues August. "Better than pumping about the country buying up sheep, eh? I could almost say I'm sick of that entire business, for it was too small for me to be bothered with—ay, but after all, I don't suppose you could exactly call it so small."

"How many sheep do you suppose you've got in all?" asked Tobias.

"Something over two thousand," said August off-handedly.

"Two thousand!" Tobias shouted.

"Two thousand!" screamed his wife.

Neither seemed able to comprehend such a vast number.

But August had not boasted with intelligence, it seems. He ought to have realized that Jørn Mathildesen and his wife were in a position at any time to correct the figure. No, he had not lied carefully and well; he had boasted merely for the moment's effect. He had imagination enough, he was inventive and romantic enough, but he was all breadth; he had no depth to his nature.

Cornelia put in an encouraging word: "There, you see, Hendrik! Now you're to have another job!"

August turned to her suddenly and asked: "And me—what do I get for it, Cornelia?"

And at this Tobias suddenly remembered that he had something to do outside and left. In the door he halted and called to Hendrik, got him to come along by pretending that he had something in the shed to show him.

"You don't answer," said August. "You must know, Cornelia, that I'm doing all this for Hendrik simply because of you."

She twisted herself this way and that and was tired and bored with the whole affair. "No, now you're not to begin all that again!" she pleaded with him.

"Aren't you ashamed!" her mother exclaimed and left them.

"For I offer you the same now as I did before," August continued, his heart and soul overflowing. "There wouldn't be a single thing on the face of the earth I'd deny you, for that's how much I love you. Many sad times I have thought of going out into the world again and leaving you behind, but I've never been able to do that. So what do you say now when I ask you, again? You won't be angry with me any more, will you?"

Plain words, tender words, courtship. And now that her eyes were on the window, she could no longer see how his mustache was trembling, an effect, which had possibly disgusted her a bit before.

Outside Tobias and Hendrik could be seen. They had been in the shed and now they had come out again. They were standing by the bicycle, talking together. It appeared that Hendrik was trying to get away and that Tobias was trying to detain him.

August waited and waited but got no answer. Cornelia was sick and tired of the whole affair; she was twisting herself this way and that and keeping a good distance away from him. He attempted to do as he had done before and made a grasp at her; he was unsuccessful, however, as she stepped beyond his reach. "You're to leave me be, do you hear!" she said sharply.

No help for him, but he begged her further, asked what harm it would do, were she simply to sit on his lap for a little—they were as good as alone, no one should see. . . .

"I will not sit on your lap!" she said. "And you needn't try to get me to!"

That wasn't what everyone said. There were, for instance, the girls at the Manor—they would be more than glad to get him.

"All right, then there's no reason to feel sorry for you!"

Hendrik entered the room. He must have torn himself away.

"It's a good thing you came," said Cornelia.

"What? How's that?" he asked.

"I say no more," she replied and clung to him closely and made up to him.

August rose from his chair and was ready to depart. He was now annoyed to find Hendrik on the way to cut out Benjamin and he said: "It isn't right of you to be so free with your love, Cornelia! You don't seem to realize that the banns are to be spoken in church for you and that Benjamin."

"I didn't promise him anything," answered Cornelia. "Don't you believe what he says, Hendrik!"

On the way home August did not feel for a moment

that his case was in any way futile—his hope seemed to spring immortal. She had held his cane across her knees, she had even said that she liked his music. . . .

Aase steps from behind a clump of bushes and stations herself in his path.

As though she were filth and sweepings he might somehow get on his shoes, he makes to go carefully around her.

Whereupon she utters some word, makes a few foolish gestures, calls down a curse upon his head, spits, and delivers herself of all the hocus-pocus with which she had gone about frightening folk there in their homes.

That odious creature! But why should he take her seriously? Just why, pray! Rather he will treat her as a joke, haha, he will simply laugh at her and permit himself to be hugely amused. "Hi there, you old bitch, you! So you're out messing again, are you? Crawling around to the different farms after a few scraps to keep yourself alive with, are you! I'm sorry for you, Aase, but I hope you don't mind if I laugh when I see you! Hahaha! You're so stiff and dried up! I suppose I could help you out with a thing or two, but I wouldn't want to dirty my fingers by touching you. No. You're the kind of a thing God never gave us a word for, that's how low you are! Peace be with you!"

CHAPTER THIRTY

EVERYTHING fell upon August to do.

At eleven o'clock that night, after he had gone to bed, a knock came on his window. He opened the window, saw that it was Postmaster Hagen outside, learned what was up, and, in all haste, threw on his clothes. It was the masons—they had begun knocking out the cellar wall!

Yes, the postmaster had gone for his usual evening walk and had discovered them. He had tried his best to stop them but they had simply referred him to August and, with their sledge-hammers and pickaxes and crow-bars, had continued to ruin that beautiful wall, even singing at their work!

That devil's own crew, they never seemed able to obey orders! To rip out a wall at night when they should have done so between eight and one the following morning!

The postmaster strode rapidly and August, thoroughly embittered, went trotting along at his side. They were out of breath when they arrived.

"Are those my orders!" August bellowed.

The workmen were guiltless, entirely guiltless—hadn't he mentioned the hours of——? And so they had agreed among themselves to do the job that very night, for there wasn't anything in the world they wouldn't do for the druggist. Between eight and one—but why exactly tomorrow morning?

August shook his head and drew the postmaster aside. As a matter of fact, August was enormously pleased with the situation, for he could now, with a perfectly clear conscience, place the blame upon the men—who, in turn, were quite guiltless. However, the postmaster had best not

hear too much about those mysterious divisions of the clock.

They glanced down at the ruin; the men had so far progressed with their work that it would be best for them to complete what they were doing. August was beside himself and shook his head. "But you heard with your own ears, didn't you, Postmaster, that they had gone against my orders?" he was careful to ask.

Yes, the postmaster had gathered as much.

"You're to lay an extra fine concrete half-deck according to the postmaster's drawing, is what I told them."

"Yes, and I don't see how they could have misunderstood that, do you?" said Hagen. "But what was that talk about eight o'clock and one?"

August cleared this obstacle as though it had been nothing at all: "I told them to set up the scaffolding for the half-deck and be finished with it at one o'clock, when the Herr Postmaster left his office, so that he could make any changes he liked before we poured the cement."

"Quite right, quite right!" said the postmaster. "But don't you think—now that they've torn out so much—that it would be best for them to keep right on?"

Yes, August agreed, upon reflection, there was no other way out of the situation.

"You must forgive me, then, for having disturbed you tonight!"

August waved this aside: Nothing of the kind! And in a terrifying voice he bellowed at his crew: "All right, lads, go ahead! But you'll hear from me tomorrow!"

So that business was now out of the way. . . .

In the morning he got hold of the gardener Steffen and together they carted the furniture up to the hunting lodge. The men were already at work up there when August arrived. They had finished with the cellar wall at one o'clock in the morning, had slept five hours—plenty of time for sleeping—and were now busy drilling

holes for the new fence, and working away with a will. Ay, boss, the job had gone well and now the druggist would find that wall of his in ruins when he returned home! August did not utter a harsh word to them for having gone against his orders. He knew his men, realized that the more enthusiastic they were about their work, the more likely they were of falling into a slump, and it was urgent that they finish their present job as soon as possible. . . .

Later he met the Consul in his office and again had a splendid interview with his chief.

Again the Consul put up a brave front with him, for this had proven so successful the last time. It so happened that Davidsen had left the bank and that the Consul had himself been obliged to take over the work—that is, take over the bank. Lord how the directors had threatened and coerced him! There was not another man in all Segelfoss to be found for the position and, the bank could not very well remain closed. And of course, there was reason in what they had said. But the Consul had his great business and his traveling salesmen, his British Consulate and Segelfoss Manor, all requiring his personal care and attention—twelve huge ledgers to keep, to say nothing of all the correspondence—and now they had cast a bank into his lap! And the whole mad situation had arisen simply from the fact that August had gone to Davidsen for money. And now August would come running to the Consul for money, would bother the life out of him with requests to draw out more money, would certainly turn up that very day. But the Consul would be as difficult in such matters as Davidsen had been; the Consul too had a conscience and would do his best to protect people from squandering their own money. Out of the question! Not a single *øre*! He would be firmness personified!

"I say, Altmulig," he said. "You were the cause of Davidsen's leaving the bank."

"I was?"

"And consequently the cause of my being forced to take over the bank."

"That can't be possible, can it!" August exclaimed. "I didn't exactly pound on the counter under Davidsen's nose."

"I do not know what the affair was between you two and I do not wish to know."

"All I asked for was a few thousand."

"Very well," said the Consul. "And his conscience did not permit him to concede to your request, I understand."

August thought this over. "If I had known all the trouble that that was going to cause, I'd never have come to that Davidsen for so much as a single *øre*. For I didn't have any use for the money, anyway."

The Consul started. "No use for it, did you say?"

"No. I've quit buying sheep. The mountain isn't big enough to feed another sheep."

The Consul appeared as a man whose life had just been spared. "Hm. Well well. Yes, every business has its turning point. But you must already own a tremendous number of sheep, I suppose?"

"Mm—no! Only a few thousand. I couldn't say as to the number before looking over my records."

"Yes, everything has its turning point," the Consul mumbled again. "So you have no further use for money, eh?"

"No," August replied. "Well, that is to say, I'll probably have to buy up a few farms, but that can wait till next year."

"You're going to buy up a few farms, did you say?"

"Farms to grow feed for the animals."

The Consul's mind was again thrown into a mad confusion. "Well now, I say! Hm! Plans calling for no small amount of capital!"

August, with a smile: "Oh, I believe I'll have capital

enough. I have various businesses in many foreign lands, you know."

"I'm glad to hear that!" said the Consul. "I wish you nothing but success! That is splendid! By the way, Altmulig—what I really wished to see you about was a point of advice. Now that I have this bank to manage, I find that something of a problem has arisen. The distance to the bank is too short for motoring and to walk there would be a waste of precious time. Do you think it would be a good plan to move that bank down here?"

August measured the office with his eye. . . .

The Consul hastened to correct the impression: "Oh, I should have to build an addition, of course."

August nodded at this. "Build right onto this wing here, cut a door through this wall——"

"Exactly," said the Consul. "What would that cost? How much of an investment would it require?"

August smiled again. "Oh, I imagine the Herr Consul could stand the cost! I could make up a little estimate, if you say so."

"Do so, Altmulig. Three rooms for the bank itself and two inner offices. Frame building."

Oh, they were comrade souls in unproductiveness, those two. Build, stir up, twist things around so long as there is a way. . . .

Before departing, August came out with a question. "Does the bank now own its own building?" he asked.

"No, it leases from Skipper Olsen—— No, I mustn't detain you any further now, Altmulig," said the Consul. "And as for this affair with Davidsen—he is a splendid man and he wishes everyone well. But your money is, of course, your own."

So much for August. Gordon Tidemand felt relieved.

And the fact that he desired to move the bank was not entirely foolish on his part. It was simply that he did not care to be seen going in and out of that tiny little building

which Skipper Olsen had once built to house himself and family—he was accustomed to doors and windows of a different order. But there was another point: once Gordon Tidemand had invested a fair sum of money in a proper bank building, the rent in the future would go to him—he would first protect himself by signing a twenty-year lease with the bank. No, he was not merely a goose, he was also a modern business man. . . .

Then something else happened: cards arrived in the mail, cards addressed to everyone in Segelfoss. Cards? From Gammelmoderen and Druggist Holm. Wedding announcements. They were married!

Everyone up at the Manor immediately threw up their hands and Fru Juliet was so stunned that she was unable to utter a word! But she smiled craftily like one peeping from beneath the handkerchief in the game of blind man's buff.

Consul Gordon Tidemand did not smile, however. Pardon him, he did not! To go at a thing in such an underhanded manner, to ignore all proper forms, to go behind his back——

"Yes, but Gordon dear," Fru Juliet objected, "you must be able to appreciate the awkwardness of your mother's position."

"My mother! I'm not referring to her, I'm referring to him! Where was the man brought up? He knew very well who the head of the family was and he could have interviewed me at any time."

"He was probably simply afraid that you would object!"

"And he had grounds for his fear, too. But such a moral coward as to fear a scene! He has behaved in anything but good form and I shall forbid him to enter our home."

"Yes," said Fru Juliet.

"You agree with me there, don't you, Juliet? He has conducted himself in the manner of the cottagers round about. Very well, then, he may live as one of them."

"I hardly blame you, Gordon," said Fru Juliet. "But when your mother comes and he is with her, I don't know——"

"Well I know! If I am at home, you may be certain that I shall show him the door!"

"Good!" said Fru Juliet.

"Nor need you expect me to spare my mother, either. After all it is she who has got us into this."

Fru Juliet with a smile: "What else could she have done?"

"She could have sent him to me."

"That might not have been so easy for her. Possibly, she, too, feared your objection to her marriage."

"She? No! Pardon me, but my mother is not a coward. No, that she is not. She may have her faults—for who is without faults?—but craven and timid? Not she! And don't you think yourself, Juliet, that the whole thing showed splendid courage on her part?"

"Magnificent courage!"

"Downright reckless courage!" he enthused. "I'd like to see anyone else who would have dared!"

He paced the floor a few times, peeped at his new-born daughter, permitted his finger to be clutched by that tiny hand. "Bless her little heart!" he cooed. "But now I must be off!" he said. "It's that wretched bank they've thrust into my hands now!"

"I trust that it will pay you a handsome salary," said his wife.

"A few thousand. But it isn't that. Don't you see, I shall be taken from my work several hours each day."

"Oh, but I'm sure you will manage, Gordon!"

"Manage? Of course! But is it your wish to have your husband all worn out before we are seventy?"

"No no! Not that, either!" Fru Juliet replied, and drew his hand down to her cheek.

Before passing through the door on the way out, he turned and said: "I've been thinking it over, Juliet, and you're right when you say that he can not be left standing outside when he comes here with mother. But I shall be cold as ice toward him, that much I still insist upon."

"Yes," said Fru Juliet. . . .

At the drugstore the cards were received with dumb amazement. The people there had surely gathered no hint of what was about to take place, and, as a consequence, they would surely do nothing about arranging the apartment until the druggist and his wife had returned—let the newlyweds have a good time arranging things for themselves! Nevertheless, a thing or two seemed to indicate that both the pharmacist and the apprentice had, in truth, known something in advance and that their ignorance was merely feigned, for otherwise what could have possessed them to perform a number of singular tasks the week before? For example, they had gone into the druggist's bedroom and moved the bed—exactly as though to make room for another bed alongside it, and what the devil business did they have in the druggist's bedroom? A day passed and then the pharmacist and the apprentice had done another strange thing: they had gone to the Segelfoss Store and bought roller shades for the bedroom windows, conveniences which the druggist had managed to do without during the whole of his sojourn in Segelfoss—splendid, close-fitting roller shades after the apprentice had put them up.

Naturally the maid left at once, that little steam engine! She simply exploded when she heard the news, refused to remain there another day, another hour, and promptly went down to the hotel to ask Vendt for her old place back again. Cornelia's sister—a regular little steam engine. . . .

When the couple arrived—the bridal couple—all Segelfoss, it seemed, was down on the pier to greet them: the doctor, the pastor, the magistrate, each stood there with his wife. Fru Juliet was not present, for she was not yet strong enough to go out, but the postmaster and the telegraph superintendent and their wives were there, many of the local shopkeepers were there, and August was there. Even August had received a personally addressed announcement and there he stood today, his hat held high in greeting. Turning to one of the small dealers who stood at his side, he remarked: "I knew it right from the beginning! They told me all about it!"

But neither the pharmacist nor the apprentice were present; they had probably stayed away to emphasize their indignation over the fact that they had not been taken into the secret. And as for the couple themselves, doubtless they had hoped that none might come to meet them; in any event, the druggist was doing his best to look shy and flustered.

At length Consul Gordon Tidemand put in his routine appearance. His steps were more hasty than usual this day, however; he had probably been curious to know the cause of this general foregathering of the local populace, and, quite unwittingly he suddenly found himself in the very midst of the common herd. As was to be expected, when he made out the centre of attraction, he wished himself dead and buried; however, as he was in for it, he simply smiled and said: "Ah, so here we have the renegades! Welcome home, mother! Good-day, Druggist!" He offered his hand to each, and his mother he even patted on the back. "You must look in on Juliet soon," he said to her. "She has been rather miserable the past week."

"Yes, I know," his mother replied. "I received a wire. But she's doing fine by this time, I suppose?"

"Yes, splendidly!—You received a wire, did you say? Then she knew where you were all the time——?"

"Good-day, Altmulig!" she said to change the subject. "You were here when we went away and you're here again when we return!"

August was holding his hat in his hand; he did not offer his congratulations as did the others, he merely bowed and was silent.

They put an end to things and left. Arriving at the drugstore, the couple discovered the pharmacist and the apprentice standing outside to receive them, though their faces were as sour as could be. And at this the druggist and his wife had their first hearty laugh since leaving to be married. The pharmacist acted as spokesman and gave utterance to the displeasure he felt—hm!—his well-founded anger over the fact that neither he nor his younger colleague had been deemed worthy to receive the glad tidings in advance of the entire town. And now nothing is in readiness for the master and mistress—the pharmacist and his colleague were in no mood to get themselves up in their Sunday best, precious stones and all. But step in, Herr Druggist, if you please—your house is just as you left it—a table and a chair and a single bed. And she, too, if it please her—Fru Druggist Holm may step right in! But the maid—that little steam engine of ours—she has gone her way, never to return, so there isn't a thing to eat in the house. The pharmacist and his colleague have eaten nothing since day before yesterday—though, to be sure, the apprentice has been drinking the whole time and has not been sober a single moment of the day, and that is why he is still unable to utter a word, but the pharmacist himself, he has not touched so much as a drop. So welcome home beneath the druggist's wretched roof which leaks both rain and sun. And, fair mistress, if it is food that she craves, it will have to be the hotel!

But the couple—bride and groom!—had not the slightest desire to dine at the hotel; the bride searched through kitchen and pantry and brought forth divers

delicate morsels of repast, the apprentice jumped on his wheel and went to the store after the articles needed and the result was a splendid feast.

After dinner, they strolled about the apartment, but as the rooms were small and few in number, their stroll consisted of simply stepping from the living room into the bedroom. On the threshold the druggist halted with a start: "What's this I see? Roller shades?" he exclaimed.

"The ones that have been here right along," the pharmacist replied. "We haven't touched a thing."

"The devil you say!" Holm replied. "And two beds?" he remarked. "I say, are you trying to convey the impression to my wife that the girl used to sleep in here with me?"

"No, we had to move her bed in here yesterday for her room was leaking so badly, you see. And we haven't yet found time to move it out again."

And thus was the situation saved.

August's only duty now was to superintend the workmen, to see that they persevered and that they did not indulge in too frequent conferences with the druggist. But things turned out as he had anticipated: the enthusiasm of the men gradually wore itself out, they continued boring holes, but in a more and more listless manner, and they broke their agreement in regard to overtime.

The Consul himself drove up to the lodge to supervise the placing of the furniture. Singular that not even the first fence had as yet been erected, he mused with a shake of his head. But August was still hopeful and explained that they were boring all the holes to begin with in order to cement all the pickets in place at one time. The work was progressing at a fair rate, he asserted.

Two days later the Consul appeared again, this time truly agitated. If worst came to worst, they must erect what they had ready of the fence, he said. August

promptly handed him the estimate he had prepared covering the construction of an addition to the Consulate. He had figured on two types of building: frame and concrete. Naturally concrete would be more in keeping with the spirit of a bank. They continued to discuss the matter for a time, but the Consul refused to allow himself to be talked out of his mental agitation and he was dejected indeed when he drove away. . . .

"There's a man missing here," said August. "Where is he?"

"Down at the shop edging drills."

"During working hours? Say, you're to take your drills with you when you quit, edge them during the evening on your own time and bring them back when you start work in the morning, you hear!"

Silence.

"Oh, it's so troublesome to keep on here," said Bolde-
mand, acting as spokesman for the crew. "We're tired and bored with the job. Hole after hole we drill and all we ever see is holes, holes, holes!"

"That's your own fault for not finishing up the job long ago," said August.

No answer to this statement. But the men showed clearly that they could do about as they pleased and that they intended to make a long-drawn-out affair of it. They were without competitors and they had no sense of honour. . . . And now the druggist had been after them to put in that new cellar wall of his, they said.

"Ay," August replied. "But not till you're finished up here!"

Why, how could their boss talk such foolishness? they asked. They could drill holes all winter long, if necessary, but to pour a concrete wall during a frost?

"Hold your jaw, the lot of you!" August shouted. "These fences are going up, do you hear!"

August weighed the matter over in his mind; he would

be powerless unless he could shoot. And he would be powerless if he shot. Nevertheless, it would be a distinct pleasure for him to discharge that revolver of his a time or two.

Then suddenly the situation is altered and the effect is felt all round. The Consul arrives on the scene with the pleasing news that the Englishman has gone to Svalbard and that he will not arrive in Segelfoss for several more weeks at least.

All well and good—they were saved! But the mistake was that the Consul uttered this information in the hearing of the men. Ho, then they would have all the time in the world! They finished out that day, but on the day following they bored no holes. No, on the day following they bored no holes! August found them busy erecting scaffoldings for the druggist's cellar wall.

The druggist was in a panic of alarm, for the Consul had recently become something of a near relative of his, as a matter of fact, his step-son. "The men came and knocked on my door last evening," he said, "and told me they were now idle. 'Good,' I replied. 'The wall three feet further in. Begin right away, I'm in a hurry!' I said."

"What's your hurry?" asked August.

"Well——" said the druggist, somewhat flustered. "No, I don't suppose there's really any need for haste. But we just wanted to have the foundation finished before snow-fall—that is, the house. And I already have a motorship on the way north with all the materials and carpenters on board. But no matter, the men are simply not to begin work on our little house before you are ready to let them go."

August thought the matter over. If the materials and carpenters were already on their way north, it was in truth high time the cellar wall was poured in order to give it a chance to set. And after all, he was of a mind to help this newly married couple—both bride and groom, dashed if he wasn't.

"We must see how we can fix it for both of us," he said.

"If a way can be found, we shall indeed be grateful to you," the druggist replied.

And thus began a period of constant worry and unrest for August. Once the men had begun pouring cement, they would have to keep on pouring till the job was finished. And at this point a fresh problem arose—the conduit between brook and cellar. But the devil and all if it wasn't this very project, this work of art, which came to interest August most. It likewise fascinated the men and in the meantime no holes were bored. He was frightened each evening upon returning home to his room, but each morning found him with renewed courage to neglect the matter of the fences along the road. And thus week after week went by.

During this period it was impossible for him to get hold of Cornelia for an earnest heart-to-heart talk. Each time he came to her home, she would be nowhere about. He was unable to understand how she could have the heart to treat him thus, knowing how fond of her he was. If only to hold her hand, he dreamed—such a pathetic little hand, she had, the fingers so rough about the nails. It touched him to think about those poor little under-nourished hands of hers. He frequently found himself in South Parish, each time on a matter of urgent business. For example, he was obliged to report to Hendrik that the Englishman had stopped off at Svalbard and again, for example, he was obliged to report to Hendrik how long the Englishman would remain in Svalbard. At no time, however, was he able to locate Cornelia.

"Where the devil is she keeping herself?" he inquired of Hendrik.

"She's hiding from me, as well," Hendrik replied.

"What's she doing that for?"

"I wish I knew. Unless she's doubting that I'm really to have that job with the Englishman."

"Did she say anything about that?"

"Ay, when she heard he wasn't coming."

August was annoyed. "You can tell her from me that when I say a thing it's so!"

But it was shortly after this that the great tragedy occurred. No further messages for Cornelia. No more business trips to South Parish. No, in a flash all that was over. . . .

Hendrik came running to him. He was not even on his bicycle; instead he came afoot, running, senselessly, without a cap on his head.

"She's dead!" he sobbed.

"Dead?"

"Cornelia!"

Silence.

"Isn't that a lie?" August asked.

Hendrik did his best to explain: They had gone with the mare that morning, both she and her father. The mare was in heat and wild—she had kicked and snapped at them and danced round and round in the road as they were leading her. But they had started down the road with her, none the less. They were bound for a stallion in the neighbouring parish. They had come to the river dividing this parish from the next and had been on the point of crossing to the other side. But the mare had refused and had danced round and round. There were two there to hold the horse but Cornelia had tumbled headlong and it was then the mare had kicked her. And that had killed her. Ay, she had been kicked squarely on the temple and she had died of it. A single kick. . . .

Silence.

Her father had run to fetch water in his hat. He imagined that she had fainted. But no, she was dead. . . .

Silence.

He had run to fetch water several times, but she had never once opened her eyes again. He had screamed for help, but this was far away by the river which divided

the two parishes, and he couldn't get her to open her eyes again and she wasn't even breathing any more. . . .

Silence.

"Were you with them?" August asked, at length.

"Me? No. Oh no. Her father came carrying her home. And that Mattis, he borrowed my bicycle and rode off to get the doctor, but that didn't do any good."

August was at this late moment quick with expedients. "What did the doctor say? Did he bleed her?"

"I don't know. He said she was dead."

"Didn't he bleed her?"

"I don't know," said Hendrik. "I didn't go inside. But when he came out he said that she was dead. And then he rode off on his motorcycle."

August recalled an episode from his travels abroad: a murderous blow on the temple with a bottle. The man was dead, but anyway they had opened one of his veins. August received Hendrik's news cold-bloodedly—he offered but scant comment and showed no visible signs of emotion. "Ay," he said. "I always used to bleed them and I told that Cornelia not to go with the mare."

"I heard you tell her," said Hendrik.

"I made my mistake when I didn't shoot that beast," said August. "I could have done another thing—I could have stabbed her for colic. But that wasn't what ailed her and that wouldn't have done her any good. No, I should have shot her."

Hendrik was silent.

Was August a stoic who refused to reveal his true heart in public? Or was it his lightness of mind, his essential shallowness which were helping him to bear the catastrophe? Both, perhaps. Cornelia was dead; August was never to have her now. His jealousy, however, was certainly relieved by the knowledge that neither was any one else to have her.

"Well, there's no help for it now," he said.

Hendrik was weeping and was having a hard time of it to conceal the fact; he cleared his throat with a series of brutal hawks, and now and then he would toss his head back to show how plucky he was.

"No, Hendrik, there's nothing we can about it now," August said gently.

"No. But kicked to death by a horse—it's so sad I can't seem to get over it."

"No," said August, absently.

Hendrik wagged his head. "And everything would have been so nice," he said, "if only both of us could have been left to live."

"Hm," said August, indifferently.

"Ay, we had an understanding, she and I, the last time we were together."

"There were probably several others she had the same understanding with," August hinted.

"What's that?" asked Hendrik quickly. "The only other one was that Benjamin. But she told me she thought a whole lot more of me than she did of him."

August, hurt and provoked at having been left out of the running: "That Benjamin was *not* the only other one and that much I happen to know——! Well, I've too much to do to stand here talking with you," he said and strode off.

CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

SEPTEMBER was nearly gone, ice-films had already begun to form over the puddles of water during the night, and if that conduit was to be finished before the frost had got into the ground, the men would surely have to hurry along with their work. In particular, there was much to be done as regards the intake up in the brook behind the five aspens: a deep cement-lined cistern must be dug and covered over with planks—and meanwhile all work on the iron fences had ceased. Oh, those wretched holes which had to be drilled and couldn't drill themselves—a spirit of mute resistance seemed to lurk in those un-drilled holes! With each new day August would resolve to march up the new road with a full crew at his disposal and once and for all have done with that matter of holes, but with each new day something would come up to prevent it. However, the Consul was no longer prodding him, for how could he do so gracefully, bearing in mind that the conduit was to be for the convenience of the druggist and his wife, the Consul's own mother?

But one day, at any rate, August and his men went up to the lodge, in the course of a couple of days bored what holes were left to be bored, and at last set up the fence. And a splendid fence it was, too, of heavy iron construction, each picket standing there erect with sharply pointed tip. The manorial spirit was at once bestowed upon the place by this iron fence, a spirit against which the Consul never in any wise fought.

The men appeared to have taken a new fit of working fever; they immediately began drilling holes along the rim of the lower steep as well and for several days they

were bursting with energy and went singing about their work. August was filled with renewed hope—ah, now things were moving along!

Tobias of South Parish came to August and begged him to come home with him. Cornelia was to be buried on the morrow and it was his wish to show August how beautifully she had been laid out with the ten yards of edging lace he had given her—oh, the lace had been draped in great folds all up and down the corpse and it was exactly as though she were lying in a bed of flowers. . . .

August replied that he had no time, that he would be unable to get away.

After all they had been to each other, the least he could do would be to look at her in her coffin and accompany her to the grave, on her last worldly journey, would it not?

No, August said, that would be out of the question.

But she would surely have asked this of him herself, Tobias continued, had she not passed away so suddenly. And her mother and all the innocent little ones, there they lay weeping, each in a different corner of the house. . . .

"That won't help things any!" said August.

Tobias realized that he was standing against an immovable mountain, but, in any event, he would have to come out with the true business which had brought him to August: He and his household were such an impoverished household, a household on its knees. And even the mare had run away and no one knew where to find her, a terrifying loss. And might not August be splendid enough to lend him a hand and help him out with the funeral expenses?

August pulled a wry face and shook his head.

It wouldn't matter how small the amount might be; it was only that Cornelia would look down from her heavenly home and see. And after all they had been to each other. . . .

August was growing weary. He snatched out his wallet,

handed over a bill and shouted: "All right—get out now—do you hear!"

Finished with Tobias and his household! Finished with each and every one of them!

In the course of these two or three days the catastrophe had rapidly retreated into the past and August was already able to regard it with complete indifference. Such was his nature. He was no longer in the slightest degree concerned with Polden which had been the field of his intensest activity a generation ago. He but vaguely recalled his young friend and comrade, Edevart Andreassen, a loyal chap who had sacrificed his life for August. He no longer had a single thought for Paulina, the woman who had come with a large amount of money to place in his hands. Everyone else in Segelfoss had been kind to this splendid person and had given her such pleasant memories as would abide with her for the rest of her days, but August had not even taken the trouble to see her off on the ship the day she had sailed, had never even mentioned her name again, had completely forgotten her. Was he dry and sterile of soul, then? He was not without human sympathy; he had a warm heart and he was forever ready with a helping hand. But he was without depth. His soul was that of the age he lived in. He was a man of splendid virtues and brazen faults. This single individual had it in his power to corrupt both town and countryside.

After all, did he have time to follow a corpse? Wasn't he beset by endless weighty problems requiring his immediate attention? The motorship bringing carpenters and building materials to town had already arrived and it was well that cellar and foundation had been prepared. They had begun to put up the house, and it was so snug and small, although long enough and neatly proportioned in accordance with its height. A genuine artist, that Postmaster Hagen!

And it was a good thing for the druggist and his wife, too, that work on the house had begun. To live in a small

two-room apartment might have been worse; in fact, they might have been happy indeed in such an apartment; but autumn was at hand and the roof was leaking and there was no point in their putting a new roof on a house they were soon to abandon. But heaven help us, that wasn't all! So many things had come for bride and groom, gifts, enormous wedding presents from Holm's family down in Bergen, and really they had no room for them in their two small rooms and a cubby-hole for a maid. Here was a situation to give one grey hairs! Furniture and household equipment of every sort, and a silver service for twelve and divers articles of luxury such as glassware and rugs, huge packing cases still unpacked for the reason that there was no place to put things. But just wait, it would not be long before the roof would be on that new house of theirs!

Druggist Holm and his wife were in a particularly happy frame of mind. They had been about town calling on their various friends and acquaintances and, naturally, their first visit had been to the Manor where they had stayed for both lunch and dinner. Fru Juliet was up again—pale and charming and incomparable! And there could be no objection to the fact that she was forever exchanging smiles with Fru Druggist Holm, for this only went to show what firm friends they were.

Now that Frøken Marna had returned home from Helgeland to assist in entertaining the Englishman during his visit, it is possible that the druggist had felt a qualm or two at the prospect of meeting her again, for he had undeniably paid her a short but intense and utterly hopeless courtship and now was married to her mother! But the meeting had proved easy, after all; Frøken Marna behaved as though nothing at all had happened. She was somewhat sluggish of mind, it seemed, so it fell quite naturally to her to adopt an attitude of indifference. Moreover, it was not for Frøken Marna to be shocked over anything which might happen here on earth, for she

had followed a certain injured day labourer to the hospital in Bodø, and the affair was hardly a secret. Let her simply bear that in mind! Pardon, Frøken Marna, a certain druggist has married your mother—what of it?

But, on the other hand, what of Fru Alfild Hagen, the postmaster's wife? With her the druggist had indulged in many a splendid flirtation, with her had played with fire, danced round and round the flames, and the remarkable thing about that situation was that they themselves had never been burnt. No, all had gone well in that direction—that is, had it? God knew! Well, she had been thoroughly well prepared, hadn't she? He had long ago laid his cards on the table for her and now, day before yesterday, he had, together with his wife, paid the good lady a most charming call. But it might well have been that behind it all he was hoping to arrange for a little *tête-à-tête* with her and to hear a thing or two from her lips. He had by no means dreaded such an interview.

One day he met her whilst out for a walk; here was a good opportunity, so they fell in step and continued their walk together.

"You didn't come to see me yesterday," she said.

"Didn't I? But wasn't it day before yesterday that both my wife and I called on you?"

"But you didn't come to see me yesterday!"

Silence.

"I wonder if I understand you correctly," he said. "Ought I to have come to see you yesterday?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"But—why exactly?"

"No reason. But you might have come and exchanged a bit of banter with me as you used to in the past."

"Naturally, I might, but the idea, I fear, is ridiculous, madam."

"All right. But I've felt so forsaken ever since you went off with her."

"Oh Lord," he said, amused. "But you and I have never

exactly belonged to each other! And we haven't parted company. Surely you can not claim to have been jilted!"

"No, but forsaken. Everyone has passed me by and here I am now—alone! Let's sit down here for a little, shall we? I have something to tell you. . . . I've never amounted to anything here in this life, but so long as I could keep myself going with some light give and take conversation, I could feel I was still part of life. It was this to which I became accustomed after failing to make good in my music abroad. There was a whole company of us failures. We used to get together and exchange our foolish banter. One might have it soft for a time and say: '*Noli me tangere!*' To which another would have the courage to say: 'Very well, Frøken, remember the pitcher goes to the well——' Things like that made us laugh. What else was there for us in life? We had failed to make good and we developed a taste for that sort of thing and we kept it up. We knew no God and we were too young to feel religion. And, naturally, there was always the hope that, some day, some way, we might still manage to succeed. We sat there in our garrets and were arty. We sang and played a bit and sometimes held parties where we drank and smoked and were bold in our speech and loved no one and even detested ourselves—the whole thing but feather-bed soldiering. We had become so totally washed out. Some married and trouble soon arose. A child was born and the child would have to be taken by either his or her parents. Some became addicted to drink, with a devil-may-care gesture and their hats on one side, they simply gave themselves up to drink. A couple of them shot themselves, but none of us ever amounted to anything. We had set out with high hopes of returning home with full honour and acclaim and in the end we were worse off than those who had remained at home. Some of us never returned home. A certain man proposed to me and I accepted him. But I had become so thoroughly diluted at heart that I was un-

able to love then and I am still unable to love today. A remarkable man, my husband—I lean upon him, he showers upon me all the goodness that is in him, but this matters not in the least to me, for I am so outside all that. But he is really a splendid man. He had hoped to become an architect; he had the talent but he lacked the means. Then he met me and that was the end of his career. But he is artist enough to understand me and to put up with me. When I kick off my shoes and one of them goes astray, he finds it and picks it up for me—yes, I remember that’s what happened yesterday afternoon when I had been half-way expecting you and you didn’t come; I sat there and kicked off my shoes. And I was irritated with him because he found them and picked them up. ‘Why did you do that?’ I asked. ‘So the maid wouldn’t think we had been fighting!’ he answered with a laugh. He is always so good to me. He understands me. And I’m fond of him, too. But those other things, love and passion—no! I lost all capacity for those after I knew I should never amount to anything. I am utterly depraved. ‘Yes, but love and affection and all that sort of thing are only forms of illness,’ he says to console me. And yes, I suppose what he says is true, but in just that way he himself has been ill all these years and he has never been able to conquer his illness. Do you know why he designed that house for you?”

“An architect is of a mind to design houses, I imagine,” said the druggist.

“Yes. But he did it in this case simply to show how free of jealousy he was. Yes. And even so, he bears this feeling in his heart like a sting the entire time. He assumes this air of superiority simply to show how splendid he is—no, it is really the finest and sincerest product of his goodness of soul; he simply does not wish to annoy me with his jealousy. I didn’t know a thing about his plans for your house until you yourself told me about them day before yesterday.”

"But he might have known that you would hear of them sooner or later," said Holm.

"Sooner or later, yes. But the moment he knows I know, he will be wretched. I haven't yet mentioned to him the fact that I know."

"That's a devil of a fine point!" exclaimed Holm.

"You don't know my husband at all," Fru Hagen went on. "You are so robust, so outspoken—just as we used to be when we would sit about in our garrets and indulge in daring conversation. And it was this I missed when you didn't come to see me yesterday—so utterly depraved have I become, I missed your vital audacity—if you will pardon the expression! I had not heard anything like it for so many years before I met you here—I had become dependent upon it after my failure abroad, for it seemed to keep life going in me—with it, I could still be something to myself. And today I went out especially to meet you, for I knew you would be along."

"I'm not sure I understand you, Fru Hagen. Would you mind were I to ask you an honest question?"

"Whether I am in love with you? No, I am not."

"You are not?"

"No. No more with you than with anyone else, I believe. No, I'm unfit for anything. I'm quite ruined. And that is how we become when we fail ourselves. We have the longing, but not the love itself—no."

"Why were you hoping to see me yesterday and to-day?"

"Well, you see, I felt deprived when you didn't come yesterday. You could have spun words with me a bit, I thought, treated me as though you enjoyed my company. But no, I was simply left there sitting in a chair! You could not have behaved otherwise, for your interests have now taken another direction. Once you told me that you yourself felt you were nothing at all, do you remember? But no, you were not completely washed out, and that already meant that you were really something. You saved

yourself through matrimony—by necessity. And about that I shall refrain from saying anything. But I—I saved myself through indifference and was never saved at all. You were so fortunate to discover the thing you needed—you found a haven—and you are so alive and so is she. As a matter of fact, I have nothing against her. And, in truth, I think she is beautiful, though I believe she is more handsome than beautiful. But dear me, what little difference that makes—her age, all those years she has lived——”

“I never give it a thought,” he said. “She is no older than I, and to put it bluntly, she is deliciously young—something which you yourself are not, if I understand you correctly.”

“I don’t know,” Fru Hagen replied. “It is possible that I, too, am deliciously young. But, in any event, it is perfectly awful of me to allow myself to be so taken up with myself. But how old is that person you are married to?” she asked suddenly. “Can’t you really tell me?”

Holm paled. “You would have the actual day and year,” he asked, “so that you can get that husband of yours to design her gravestone——? Well, first you may put down April——”

“But you surely must realize the effect of this thing you have done, Druggist Holm——”

“Is it worse than that which you yourself have done?”

“There’s a difference. No, possibly it is no worse. But you haven’t always been a bourgeois.”

“And you mean to indicate that that is what I have become? Would it have been better for me, then, to have gone about here to the end of my days boasting of the fact that I was no bourgeois? One can not live on an attitude, you know.”

“I suppose it has its own value, though—I don’t remember, is that what we used to call a fictitious value? Once I was called upon to play at a party given by a certain Countess, and her dresser set was of pure gold. I saw on her

dresser a golden powder-box. She did not give it to me but I saw it. And it is none too poor a thing simply to have seen it."

"Generally speaking, you are quite right," he said. "But so far as she and I are concerned, we don't even have such a thing as powder."

"Nor do I, either," she replied.

"No?"

"Oh just once I used it, and it was nasty of you to have noticed it."

"Haha! I thought it was about time we were going at it in the old way!"

"Fictitious values, we used to call them there in our garrets. We got married with nothing but powder on our noses," she said. "With no more than a silk ribbon about our waists and powder on our noses we took what there was to marriage. And you?"

"No, we sprouted no such luxuriant wings as that, but Heaven bless you, Fru Hagen, how we took what there was to marriage!"

Silence.

"Well, I must be getting along home to see about dinner," she said. "We're to have clam chowder this evening," she added with a smile.

"You have a maid, haven't you?"

"Yes, for we have all the post-office people to feed, you see."

"We likewise have our help to feed, but we keep no maid," he said, somewhat pointedly.

"Yes, but I am so clumsy in the kitchen."

"No, that you most certainly are not. You are merely troubled with fictitious values."

"No, he says that I should never play any more were we to be without a maid. He keeps the girl to spare me. For, you see, I have a couple of pupils who pay in five *kroner* per month."

She rose and shook her skirts; she had had her little

talk and no longer felt blue. Perhaps she had felt no urgent need, but when at length the topic turned again to the question of love, she took pains to repeat her assertion that she was in no way in love with him. Mm——no, she really preferred her husband to him! But a bit of idle banter now and then—after all, when one realizes oneself to be a nonentity—and left sitting alone in a chair——?

They parted company and went their separate ways. A change had somehow come over her; she was so candid, a bit emotional, as well, and so garrulous—had she perhaps tasted the soup sherry rather too thoroughly before leaving the house? Anything was possible.

He found his wife at the new place. Apparently neither of them could stay away. They would steal off there singly or together and there one might find them, morning and evening, both early and late. Carefully they would take note of how much work had been done and how much still remained. They had furniture from Bergen to be moved in, they had a number of cases to be unpacked. . . .

“You here?” she asked.

“And you? Aren’t you going home to get dinner?”

“We’re having a cold supper tonight. What time is it?”

“I refuse to tell you any more. You ought to depend upon your own watch!”

“I like yours better!” she said, pulling his watch from his vest pocket, glancing at it and nodding. “Plenty of time! Didn’t you go out for your row today?”

“No,” he replied. “I met Fru Hagen and stopped to have a chat with her.”

“Just imagine, Konrad, what if I could play like she!”

“I have no desire that you should. For, if you could, you would not be the person you are.”

Nought but love and tender words between them. They mentioned the fact that the postmaster’s plans called for carpets in both parlour and bedroom and agreed that in a day or two they would have to take him down to the store with them to pick out a proper carpet. Like newly-

weds, they talked about their new little dining room, agreed that it would be positively bursting with silverware, what with their service for twelve and all their other pieces. Good Heavens! And Fru Holm even brought up a subject they had several times mentioned before—that little red room! She felt it would be nice if he could have a little private office convenient to his business. Well, what did that have to do with the red room? Oh, nothing perhaps, but it would make such a pretty little office for him! Who ever heard of such an idea from an otherwise intelligent person!

"There comes Altmulig!" she said.

August bowed and immediately expressed himself as pleased with the house as it stood. Splendid it was to see how rapidly they were getting along with the work. "I have to take a turn down here every once in a while when those men of mine are ugly and hard to get along with," he remarked.

"Can't you get them to obey orders?"

"Sometimes I can. But they know they can do about as they please and they're dragging out the job on the road."

"Wasn't their work satisfactory down here?" asked the druggist.

"Ay, and especially in the beginning. And now they've decided they want to come back down here to work."

"Here? What more is for them to do here?"

"The out-building," said Fru Holm.

They all laughed over the druggist's forgetfulness and his wife asked him where he supposed he would pile his wood, dry his clothes and store his food——?

"In that red room of yours!" he whispered into her ear.

"Fruen is right," said August. "There must be a bit of masonry to hold up the outhouse. But the Consul is anxious to get up that other fence of his—he's in a hurry for it. So I must keep my men on the job up there a few days more, Herr Druggist."

"Naturally! No, they are simply not to come down here until you are through with them."

"Good!" August said with a nod.

The south-bound steamer was whistling her arrival. The druggist glanced at his watch. "Now you must be going, Lydia," he said.

"No, it's you that must go," she said. "I have a tiny wee matter to mention to Altmulig. I'll be along immediately."

Oh, of all the matters that had to be taken up with Altmulig! There now, the druggist's wife had drawn him to one side and was telling him some manner of secret, was admitting something to him and there she stood with downcast eyes, which was most unusual for her. No, now honestly what did Altmulig think of her, and what ever would he say when he learned what she had to tell him! Such were her introductory remarks.

August stared at her and waited.

"Yes, you're looking right at me," she said. "But I don't suppose you can tell it to look at me yet, can you?"

She had accompanied these words with a certain pointing of her finger and that keen August, he smiled a knowing smile and observed: "Ay, I suppose it's nearing the time!"

That devil of a fellow, how polite he was about this matter—no amazement, no reference to her age, no indication that such was quite incredible! Ay, he supposed as 'twas nearing the time, he had said.

"Now honestly what do you think?" she said. "You must tell me what you think!"

"What I think! I think it's the only right thing for you two to do!" he said. "And if it's me you're wanting to hear from, I'd say as it's a grand blessing from the hand of the Creator that you've done it. That's all I've got to say."

"I'm certain that I got it on our bridal night," she said, "for he's such a one when it comes to that! And even when I was almost dead with seasickness on our way home, it

still stayed by me. But now I'm almost ashamed of what people will say!"

"Ashamed? Say, you'd better not feel that way about it! Is that any way to talk about the fruits of our loins!"

Oh, how staunchly he stood by her side in all things! And how happy he made her feel! He was the finest confidant she might have selected in her present state of joyful unrest! He was a priceless, an indispensable friend, a man to whom one might go in trouble and with whom one could share one's ecstasy!

"I had to tell you, Altmulig," she said, "for you've always been so lovely to me."

August was grateful for her words and paid her back in kind: "Ay ay, Fru Holm, I say no more. But now that you've begun this way, this won't be the last time you'll be coming to me with such a bit of news."

She laughed tenderly at his remark and brushed the thought aside as something quite out of the question. No, but didn't he think then that she ought to feel ashamed of what people might say and, as a consequence, stay indoors?

"Are you out of your head!" he exclaimed. "Don't mind me if I say it! And if anybody ever dares to say anything about you—those words will be their last here in this life if it's me who happens to hear them. You needn't worry about that!"

She hesitated as though there were something she still wished to say, something difficult for her to put into words. Yes, but come out with it she must, for possibly this was the most important point she had to communicate. "Still, as things stand with me," she said, "it seems I'm afraid of something! It's a horrible thought, and I don't know what to do. There wouldn't be anything to it, if only I could feel myself safe. But now I'm to have a red room with two windows here in the new house and that will be far pleasanter for me than when I had my other chil-

dren. All that. But I'm afraid that something might happen—that someone might come back—do you understand, Altmulig—come back again——?”

August, with that keen head of his, cut her short and said: “Not a chance!”

“What?”

“No, not a chance, I say!”

“Well, so you may think!”

August must at all costs set her mind at rest for the time being, she was in need of that. Then later he could think of saving her in other ways—it was nothing for him to think of saving himself and others—blueberries for him! No hint of anything here, either; no reference to a certain sum of seven hundred *kroner*—he had no need of such a device. When he spoke, his words were merely oracular, mystically prophetic: “You needn't bother your head about that for a minute! The one who went away has gone away for life and death and he's not coming back!”

A dark and mysterious utterance, one she could hardly doubt. “Bless you, Altmulig!” she said. . . .

After leaving the new house, August decided to return to his men up on the road, but one of the lads from the store came racing up to him with a message from the Consul—the Englishman had just arrived on the steamer! The two gentlemen were already hiking up to the Manor with the dogs, as the lord had wished to stretch his legs after his long sea voyage, but August was to come at once and see to his luggage in the freight shed. The car was in the garage.

So the lord from England had arrived! Well well, so that last road fence could not be erected in time after all! Such a simple piece of work, but something dark and fateful seemed to have enshrouded the entire project, and, after all, one of the steepes would be left to drop sheer from the roadside. What elusive something was it that

sometimes got into folk and filled them with inexplicable obstinacy?

It irritated old Altmulig to feel himself thus baffled. It worried him not in the least to be considered unreliable in unofficial matters, but where his work was concerned he was forever earnest and conscientious—a quality he had no doubt acquired through much training and discipline from the mighty skippers he had served at sea. Oh, if a man had been caught shirking his duty in those days!

He drove up to the Manor with the Englishman's luggage and helped the gardener Steffen carry it into the house. The Consul stepped to the door with the flags—both Norwegian and British—and requested him to hoist them.

August was deeply depressed. "We didn't manage to get up that last fence for you," he said.

"No. Oh well, there's nothing to be done about that now," the Consul replied. "I say, Altmulig, our English guest must have a man—a youngster—to accompany him when he goes shooting in the mountains."

"I've already arranged for such a man," replied August. "Only he doesn't know English."

"That's nothing. The lord is a clever fellow. He knows a good bit of Norwegian."

"All right, then, I'll just take and skip out to South Parish and tell the lad he's to come."

"No, now I say, Altmulig," said the Consul. "You mustn't think of going that long distance afoot. Jump in the car and drive out. Bring the man back with you and have him sleep here tonight. The lord wants to get off to an early start in the morning——"

August knew the road; he had walked it hundreds of times with turmoil in his breast. How humbly he had gone forth each time and how humbly he had returned! But now all that was forgotten; this time he was speeding along in a motor car, he was a person of consequence now.

He was of no mind to avoid the gaze of Tobias and his family; no, he fairly shook the house as he went thundering by. Climbing the hill to the neighbouring farm, he sounded his horn three times to call Hendrik out to the car. The whole of South Parish could hear those trumpet blasts. August was obliged to wait whilst Hendrik changed his clothes from top to toe and, in the meantime, he stepped out of the car and sauntered about, as though he, too, were obliged to stretch his legs after a long sea voyage. Folk came rushing out of the cottages round about and stood there to watch him saunter. A pity it was, then, he lacked a cigar!

Starting back to town with many a blast of the horn, he observed that Hendrik was smiling timidly as he sat there by his side. But as the latter was something of a master cyclist and had often sped along over a country road, he soon pulled himself together and undertook to utter a few words. "Well, so the Englishman's here, is he?" he asked.

August did not reply.

"If only Cornelia could have lived to know it!"

August did not reply, confined himself to driving. Outside Tobias' house the family had gathered as though to watch a parade, but August had no eye for them—he merely thundered past as before. Of a truth, he had no cause to be angry with them, but as they had all stood witness to his tender passion, it was essential that they should now gain a new impression of him. Of little Mattis, however, he would surely make an exception; he was a splendid little chap, and August would make it a point to remember him with a *krone* every now and then, perhaps would even find a place for him when he opened his office in town.

"She's a demon the way she runs!" Hendrik said of the machine.

No, August simply refused to reply, but he would

nevertheless give Hendrik an idea of the way a man in a car should behave. Coming to the little cluster of huts which was the old, forgotten Segelfoss and where a party of children were again playing about in the street, he brought his car to a stop, stepped out and scrutinized each youngster's face. These were possibly not the same children he had seen here the last time, but they knew him by report and immediately came flocking about him and gave him their little hands in thanks when he tossed them a ten-*kroner* bill to divide. He asked for the old grave-digger and the children ran off to fetch him.

He came out bareheaded as before, an old, old man with a worn-out wrinkled face, a truly nameless creature. And such a face as he had! August, buoyant and peerless, on the other hand—a man, as it were, in full bloom—was horrified by the sight of him. How utterly decrepit he had grown in no time, in but a few months, exactly as would a corpse, drifting ashore after three weeks in the water! Creation no longer had a place for him; he didn't even know what a skyscraper or an elephant was in the inventory of the Lord. But in only a few months to have descended to such a state! It was the weakness they had in them, they lacked the buoyancy of life. August, in full bloom, was horrified.

The old man recognized him and stood there twitching.

"You were right," August declared. "There *are* trout up in the lake!"

"Trout? Oh ay," mumbled the old man and wagged his head over the grand memory it contained. "It was that Theodore. And before him it was that Holmengraa of the mill. Ay, but before him it was that Willatz Holmsen, and he was first and best——"

August handed him ten *kroner*, stepped into the car and drove away.

CHAPTER THIRTY-THREE

THE lord from England was a topping fellow. To him it was merely "interesting" that a mountain should drop sheer from the roadside. There he stood on the very edge of a terrifying abyss, some nine hundred feet beneath his bootsoles, and chatted away with the workmen in Norwegian. August replied to him in English.

By all means, August knew English! And now Hendrik and the men should hear him and be properly amazed. But the lord appeared indifferent to August's English, as he was to everything about August. This irritated the old man; he withdrew to one side and perhaps even began wondering to himself if the man from England, after all, might not even be a "Right Honourable"—at any rate, he acted like one. But August himself was no nonentity—he had seen great captains and presidents in his time, and he decided at once to give this Englishman a taste of what he was like. He bought himself a supply of cigars at the Segelfoss Store and made much of the art of cigar-smoking whenever he happened to meet the lord who himself smoked no more than a stumpy curve-stem pipe. He also took to strolling up the new road with a walking stick in his hand, thus to create the impression that he was no ordinary gang foreman whose place was on the job with his men. And the day came when the lord must have taken pity on him, for he addressed him, asked him certain questions about the fish, explained that he spoke Norwegian while in Norway for the purpose of acquiring the language, that he always made an effort to speak the language of the natives in no matter what part of the world he happened to find himself. He had once spent some time in the Cau-

casus, but "*svarte fan*," if he hadn't been up against it there, for down there he had had no less than seventy languages to learn!

They got along fairly well together, though, to be sure, they had but very little to do with each other—they would merely meet, exchange greetings, speak a word or two, always in Norwegian, and part when the lord went his way. Hendrik would carry the fish, et cetera, but the lord never failed to carry at least something—as a rule, the provision bag.

The Consul made a practice of driving his guest up or down the mountain road, but the lord was unimpressed by this. "You've no time for it," he would say to the Consul.

A remarkable man, that Englishman, a man of the people, talkative and single, in truth a bit middle-class. His name was Bolingbroke, though he was surely not one of *the* Bolingbrokes, and God knew whether in the olden days the family name had not been simply Broke. It might well have been, he said, and whether it had been or not was likewise a matter of huge indifference to him! And why should he be driven back and forth in a car? He had freed himself from home ties for the purpose of hunting and fishing, not motoring.

On the other hand, he would occasionally go for a stroll with Frøken Marna. Not because there was anything entertaining about her—she was heavy and indolent in her manner—but merely for the reason that he could thus fish in company with a beautiful lady instead of with simply Hendrik. And what remarkable conversations they would have together! He had learned his Norwegian from a peasant up north and this he used without hesitation. The lady would reply to him in the language of her infancy, and when in a tight place to make themselves understood, they would both take refuge in lusty profanity.

Hendrik would listen to them with unbounded amazement. Whenever the lord remarked that anything was

"*svarte fan*," * the lady would simply repeat his statement and lower her eyes with a smile. There she would stand with a sly look on her face, just as though she had thoughts of her own to consider, which undoubtedly was the case. The devil and all if lady Marna wasn't altogether too fine to be throwing herself away on a life of indolent ease instead of marrying and having ten children! That wild oat she had squandered upon a common day labourer had been so wholly without good sense, but, after all, there had been little enough in her daily life at Segelfoss Manor or at the home of her sister in Helgeland to uncover the true depths of her nature. Nor was the lord anything to tempt her, either; he was really not tempting to any one. Possibly he was not such a bad sort back home amongst his own people, but here at the height of his idiotic sporting fever, he was quite impossible. He was not bad looking, however; sinewy and raw-boned, to be sure, but with a face that was attractive enough, despite his English teeth. He might possibly have been something of an aristocrat, a flirt and a dandy had he tried, but he simply wasn't trying; the spirit of sport was upon him and he was taken up with nothing save fishing and shooting, how heavy each trout was, how he had been obliged to change flies three times before landing this miserable trout here, this puny little runt! Interesting enough conversation for the other inmates in a lunatic asylum, but quite barren of moonlight and kisses and frantic romance. One day Marna had got herself soaked stepping out of the boat, but do you suppose he had made the slightest effort to dry her with his breath or even to hold her hand?

Frøken Marna was sincerely bored to death with the lord and one day asked her brother point blank how long they were to have the fellow with them. The Consul

* *Svarte fan* = anything but a parlour expression.—Translator.

quickly answered sh-sh, that she was to keep still, that the longer he stayed the more pleasant it would be. He must at least have time to exercise his dogs and to shoot what ptarmigan there were. And, though he would actually be leaving them soon, he would return to them sometime during the winter to behold the aurora borealis. It might be that he would stay on with them over Easter in order to hear the trumpeting of the swans. Both of these phenomena he yet had to experience personally.

"Then it's Helgeland for me!" said Frøken Marna.

"What a pity!" her brother replied. "For I'm certain he'll come seeking your hand."

"Don't jest about it! Once he actually went so far as to tell me that he'd never been married."

"Ah, you see! That remark must surely have had some significance!"

A splendid friendship between sister and brother, but their jesting was always quiet and refined in manner. Never a sign of slapping themselves on the knee when they laughed; Marna was too stiff for such a gesture and her brother too much the gentleman, though they would give way to the spirit of fun sufficiently to smile. Only when their mother was about was there anything like laughter in the house. And, truth to tell, it was always so refreshing to have her with them, for she could laugh from the very depths of her heart and so thoroughly that her eyes would close to narrow slits with tears of mirth at the corners. But dear me, she was no longer there at the Manor, she was down with the druggist, she was Fru Holm now, and all that. What a singular career she had had!

"Well, now you must be going, Marna. You're wasting my time!" Gordon might say to get rid of her.

But Marna might also carry the jest further by asking him what good there was in having a British consul in Segelfoss when he couldn't so much as arrange matters between herself and a certain English lord?

"Now, Marna, please leave of your own free will! Don't make me show my teeth!"

Poor Gordon Tidemand, he had so much to do! Careful and accurate as he was, there was no end of book-keeping and correspondence to be got through, and he might well have felt himself in dire need of help. But there was no one in the entire land who could write as neatly and figure as correctly as he, and he therefore continued to toil through his duties alone. Moreover, a lady typist could hardly post figures in those heavy ledgers of his with a typewriter!

Gordon Tidemand was in a splendid humour. A ripping year for salmon, this, representatives covering the territory to both north and south of him, Juliet up home, a new child now and then, things improving for him in every quarter. He saw from his personal account that his salary as head of the bank was clear profit, a sudden addition to his income, and this immediately enabled him to pay off something on his debt of ten thousand to the bank. Had he not been Gordon Tidemand, he might have taken something of a fling. Instead, he telephoned for his mother to come to his office.

When she arrived he threw down his pen in irritation and sharply asked her what she wanted with him.

"You monkey, you almost had me frightened!" she said.

"I've barely succeeded in getting rid of Marna and here you come. Sit down!"

"If you'd like to know what I wanted," said his mother, absorbed in her own affairs, "I just wanted to tell you that they're already finished with the roof and that they've now begun on the floors over at that new place of ours! Isn't that splendid?"

"Mere vanity!" he jested. "You just wanted to build so that you could lord it over Juliet, I know!"

"Have you seen the house? It's simply lovely!"

"I can't for the life of me see what you two solitary

people want with all those rooms!" said her son. "That one you call the red room, for example."

"No, I don't suppose you've any cosy little dens in that castle of yours!"

"Who is paying for all this grandeur?" he asked.

"It's a wedding present from his family."

"Not really?"

"Yes. In spite of the fact that he never appeals to them any longer."

"I suppose that's some of your work?"

"Yes. I'm responsible for that. We don't want to be dependent upon anyone."

"So," said her son. "Yes, you're good enough for me, mother! Even so, I don't think it was very nice of you to go away and leave us the way you did. I don't know how I'm going to get along without you."

"You who have become head of the bank and everything else there is to be! What do you get in the way of a salary?"

"Nothing!" he snorted. "A few thousand. Hardly enough to keep Juliet in hairpins!"

"I won't talk with you when you're in this mood," she said, and rose threateningly.

"Tut tut! Stay a bit! Sit down again! Who ever saw such a temper! I called you here to ask if perhaps we hadn't best send out the seines this autumn."

"Yes, of course we must."

"Yes, you went off and got married and left everything for me to do!"

"Have a talk with Altmulig about it," said his mother.

"And then there was another matter I wanted to ask you about. Isn't it splendid that we now have a highway leading all the way up to the hunting lodge?"

"Yes, perhaps it is."

"You wanted a footpath. But now we have a highway,

a regular *chaussée*. Otherwise how could we have driven the lord up the mountain?"

"No."

"There, you see!"

"But I like to keep my feet on the ground, Gordon. Hadn't we better be thinking of going out to the downery after down pretty soon?"

Her son fumed: "That little mouse hole! Just wasting our time!"

"One thing plus another, Gordon! Your father bought that downery and made something out of it, and everyone up in that castle of yours sleeps in down to this day, you know."

"Do you know what," her son suddenly proposed. "What would you say if we were all to go out there now while the lord is with us?"

"That lord, that lord! I should really like to see him some time. Marna does a good bit of smiling whenever she tells me about him."

"Yes, they swear together in Norwegian! But otherwise, he's no one to smile over—he's an able man."

"And a lord?"

"Hm——!" said Gordon and hesitated.

"He isn't a lord?"

"Keep still! Naturally he isn't a lord. But now you'd just better not go out and spread it all over town!"

"No, I'll never tell!"

"Not to a soul, do you understand! If you do, everything will be over between us!"

"Haha! Why must it be such a great secret, though?"

"It wasn't I that spread the report that he was a lord," said Gordon. "At least not in the beginning. That must have been something our old friend, Altmulig started. But, when it comes to that, I certainly have no objection to having it said that we are entertaining a lord. There's

something in that, you know! And what's more, Davidsen has already mentioned him in the paper as being a lord, and it would be a pity indeed were we to rob him of his title!"

"Hahaha!" his mother laughed heartily. "What does he say himself about being taken for a lord?"

"He himself? Why, he doesn't know a thing about it. He just goes about talking that Norwegian of his and is '*dus*' * with everyone between here and Finmark!"

His mother laughed until her eyes grew moist.

"But don't you give away everything you know, Mother! At least not until later," said her son. "He comes of a fine rich family, and he was so wholly splendid to me when we were at the academy together, invited me home with him many times and put himself out for me no end. His family lives in a gorgeous country house, servants, chauffeur and all that—vast wealth, engaged in some important business or other. He keeps to himself here simply because he doesn't wish to impose upon us, and that's why I felt I'd like to show him that he isn't exactly out of his own world while with us here in Segelfoss. So it occurred to me that we might invite a few people and make something of an excursion out to the downery. What do you think of my idea?"

"All right. Whom will you invite?"

"Sandwiches and beer, a humble feast but delicious. I say, I imagine that we might be able to make something of an exquisite affair of it, eh what?"

"Yes, but whom will you take along?"

"I? Everything is always left to me! Why can't you and Juliet put your heads together and decide a few things for yourselves!"

"There, there! Forgive me!"

"Yes, but am I not right in what I say? As though I

* Uses the familiar form of address.—Translator.

didn't have enough to do as it is! Now that he has begun hunting, there's a certain other gentleman I know who would most thoroughly enjoy accompanying him. But no! The bank must be moved down here, and here are two estimates I've prepared, one for a frame building and one for a concrete, but do I get the slightest degree of cooperation from you two ladies in helping me to choose!"

"Hahaha!"

"And you laugh at me! But I must really show some enterprise and start up one thing or another, mustn't I! I can't afford to be idle and simply live on rent, can I? And now that I think of it, I'm sure we shall have to provide both wine and dessert. Am I right?"

His mother shook her head and flatly said no.

"There, you see! No matter what I propose!"

"Don't worry, we'll manage without you."

"Yes, and now it's come to that! But there's one thing at least for which you really must give me credit: the vast amount of energy and enterprise the gardener has shown since you went away and left us. For that you need take no credit to yourself."

"I?" she asked.

Of course, Gordon was jesting; yes yes, to be sure. But his words were, none the less, based upon a really serious condition. He had been sorely perplexed at the Manor ever since his mother had left; he knew nothing of the operation of an estate himself and the gardener Steffen had suddenly got lead in his heels and had taken up a life of indolent ease. The rain was over and the crops were under cover, but why hadn't he got at his threshing right then and there instead of leaving the mice time to eat the crops up? He was blaming it on the fact that he didn't have men enough to help him, but he had certainly not put himself out in the least to get hold of a crew to help him, had he? Were he to start out on his bicycle of an evening these days, it would be simply to go calling on

his sweetheart out in the country, and in the morning when he returned he would be slacker than ever in his work. In the past it had been Gordon's mother who had kept an eye on all such details, but now, as matters stood, she had left him. What about the potatoes? Wasn't it also time that they were out of the ground?

His mother considered the day of the month. "Yes," she said.

"There, you see, Mother!" said Gordon. "I'm not so downright stupid, am I? I've kept a written record of the time for several years now and I have the ability to compare! You used to laugh at me for writing everything down, but how can one be expected to carry everything in one's head, now tell me!"

No mistake, Gordon Tidemand would write and write and was handy indeed with a pen, for he could keep nothing in his head or his heart. He had learned nothing of the art of sowing and reaping in those schools he had attended abroad. What he had learned had been simply to keep records. Did he ever glance up at the sky for the sake of his growing things? What were best for field and meadow, sun or rain today? Even though it might be a question of standing ready to save what there was to be saved!

He continued to jest with his mother. "You didn't say anything to us before you left—you ran away, that's what you did!" he scolded. "And you didn't even wait to teach Juliet how to take your place after you had gone. I shan't say a thing about myself, I've said too much already—but Juliet, she might have taken hold far better than she has."

At this point his mother admitted that he was right. Oddly enough, she had begun to develop a feeling of guilt; her son was at his wits' end and this touched her. "I shall certainly come up and see you at the Manor now and then!" she said.

"Yes, please do!" he exclaimed and took her up on her promise. "Have a talk with Juliet and urge her to take hold of things. I suppose I could speak to her myself, but you can do it so much more gracefully than I—I'm not much of a hand when it comes to that—I can't seem to find the right words. But remember, mother, it mustn't come from me—the idea is all your own!"

True though it was, she had sat there with tears in her eyes, she was at this point obliged to laugh in spite of them. Cowardly and evasive her son was, but not without consideration for the feelings of others. And as for herself, she was proud to learn that she had been missed, that she was indispensable up at the Manor.

"Well, I must be going," she said.

Gordon glanced at his watch. "No, sit down a bit. I'm expecting Altmulig. He's as punctual as this watch of mine. He'll be here in a very few minutes now."

"What do you want of him?"

"I want to ask him whether it's time to send out the seines," he said.

August arrived, removed his hat, bowed to both the Consul and his mother and stood there with body erect. He was himself again now that his romance was over. He could eat and sleep in peace now, and he had actually put on weight.

"I have observed, Altmulig, that you have not been drawing your wages for some months now," said the Consul.

August was taken by surprise with this remark and hesitantly he replied that well, he had of course lacked the time, so perhaps——

"Here you are!" said the Consul handing him an envelope on which the account had been figured.

"But I haven't been working for the Herr Consul for some months now," he mumbled.

"Oh yes, you have, part of the time, at least. That's been my impression right along."

"But I've had my room and board——"

A slight wrinkle had appeared between the Consul's eyes and August realized that it would not be his place to dispute. He was merely to express his thanks.

"And now there's a point on which mother and I should like to consult you: would you advise us to send out the seines at this time?"

"Have you had any news about herring?"

"No."

August thought about the matter. "Of course, there's always herring in the sea," he said. "But right now and in our northern waters—I haven't heard of any whales or flocks of birds anywhere about——"

"Then I assume you consider it too early?"

"The potatoes are still in the ground and are ready to be taken out."

"But that's work for the womenfolk, isn't it?"

"Ay, it isn't that, it's the time of the year. Things have been so arranged for us that one thing must follow with the next."

"How long would you wait, if you were I?"

"No," said August and shook his head over such a foolish question. "That all depends upon news and reports, the things folk are talking over Sundays there at the church, and what the telegraph wires say. And then we have our old weather signs and changes of the moon. But as it's always been said and talked over again and again, the sea will always be loaded with herring from now till the end of time, and in a couple of months it may be that we'll be hearing of one thing or another."

"Thank you, Altmulig. There was nothing more. If you are on your way home, we might drive up together?"

In order not to decline the Consul's invitation, August

accompanied them in the car. They first drove the Consul's mother over to the drugstore and from there they drove straight home. But upon getting out at the Manor, August immediately walked back to town. It seems he had promised the doctor's wife a secret conference.

"Ay, now I've done it," said Fru Esther.

"Hm," replied August. "So you've done it!"

"I'm carrying it here," she said, placing her hands on her breast.

"What did he say?"

"Oh dear, I haven't told him about it yet. But now I must tell him, for if I don't soon, he'll find it out for himself. You must come along home with me, August."

"I wouldn't think of doing anything else!" he replied.

"And if he becomes angry with me, you must help me."

"You needn't think I won't!" said August.

Poor little Esther, that pretty little lady, if she wasn't afraid of that husband of hers! A devil of a note! August mused.

Slowly they approached the doctor's home; they had so much to talk over, she nervous over what might happen, he confident and downright exuberant over the thought of a possible fracas with the doctor. Even now her mind was harassed with doubts, though she had already accomplished her ends and was thus in the hands of fate. You see, it was a little girl she had her heart set on, but suppose it should turn out to be a boy?

Well, said August, no harm done if it were. For having done it once, she could do it again and again until the result was a girl!

"No," she objected. "That would provoke him too much."

"I'll help you out each time!" said August.

Regardless of the fact that this was debatable common

sense, his words went far to console her and to restore her courage. His helpfulness knew no bounds.

But everything turned out other than they had anticipated.

After they had entered the house and had sat down, the doctor came into the room and it was immediately apparent to his wife that something was troubling his mind. Had he already discovered her duplicity? She was horribly excited and her mouth was white when she spoke, almost as white as those teeth of hers with which she had chewed charcoal during her youth in order to make them white.

"How talkative you are tonight," said the doctor.

"Am I? Perhaps I am."

"You imagine that I am angry, but that I am not!" He pulled from his pocket a piece of paper and handed it to her. "From that lover of yours!" he said with a dry laugh.

"Oh, him!" she cried, delighted that it was nothing else.

"You threw it in the stove, but the fire was out," he said. "So how could the girl help seeing it there?"

"Yes, it was exactly as though it wasn't for me," Fru Lund replied. "What did I want with it when it wasn't from you?"

The doctor appeared somewhat abashed and said: "You mean that?"

"Yes, I do."

"Did it come by mail?" he asked.

"I don't know," his wife replied. "Malla brought it in to me." She rang for Malla and asked: "Who was it that came with this letter for me a while ago?"

"The magistrate's secretary," Malla replied.

"Thanks."

"Oh, so he brought it himself!" said the doctor. "Well, if you didn't even know who brought it, you couldn't have been very much interested in it."

"No. I can't understand what he wants of me. We've talked a bit together. He told me where he was from, a pretty town, he said, but I can't remember the name. And I told him that I was from Polden and that it was prettier there than here. And at that he said: 'If there are any more such pretty ladies in Polden, that's the place for me'."

"Yes, and I suppose you didn't object to hearing that from his lips?"

"No," she replied candidly. "I laughed and made a bit of a fuss over him. And I said that I supposed he had a pretty lady of his own back in the town where he came from. That's absolutely all there was to it. But now he's made a fool of himself."

"Well, there isn't so much in this letter of his, after all."

"I don't remember a word," she said and handed the letter back to him.

He refused to accept it. "No, I guess you'd better burn it, Esther," he said. "That would be the best thing to do!"

She rose and thrust the letter into the stove. "Never saw anything like it!" she said. "I never talk with anyone and I've never talked with him more than twice and both times right there on the street. What could he have found to write me about?"

"Hahaha!" laughed the doctor. "Did you ever hear the like, August?"

"Fru Lund hasn't read it," said August. "But from what I should imagine, all it said was that a young and handsome man would like to meet the prettiest lady he knew."

The doctor laughed again. "Ah, now August is beginning again, Esther! And almost in the same words as those of the magistrate's secretary!"

All three were highly amused.

But August's remark had nevertheless sunk into the

doctor's mind. "A young and handsome man, eh? Yes, he is not a one-eyed monstrosity. He isn't as old as I. He can crisp his curls and make pretty speeches to the ladies."

Ah, now the opportunity was at hand! Esther said: "You're to keep still with such nonsense, Karsten! I have something else to think about."

"You have?"

"Yes. I'm to have a little girl."

"What!" exclaimed the doctor.

"I'm going to have a baby."

Silence.

"Well," he said at length. "Undeniably that's a piece of news!"

At this August undertook to step in; up to this point, he had been present as a negative quantity, and such was not to his liking. "I don't know what I can say to that, Doctor," he blurted. "Is it news when married folk have children?"

The doctor did not reply to his remark; it had quite annihilated him. He hunted about in his mind for an adequate retort, found none and there was no excitement.

"You spoke of curls and pretty speeches, Karsten," said his wife. "But after I've had my little girl, I'll hear no prettier words than hers."

The doctor became thoughtful: perhaps it was best so, perhaps it presented a fine solution to the entire problem, for a wife with child surely could not flirt. "Well well, Esther," he said. "I think you're splendid! Yes, a splendid person. I really must look up to you! And now I can only beg you to be careful, for this is no light matter, you know—a woman of your years——"

Of that much, at least, he would remind her—that she was no longer so frightfully young!

She was exceedingly happy over the fact that he had so graciously given in to her; she sprang up and hugged him and stroked his hair. In the end, he was obliged to

warn her against crushing him too tightly against her breast.

"Why, why!" he exclaimed. "August might even be led to believe that you are in love with me!"

"That's what I want him to believe!" she retorted.

But the devil and all, if he wasn't still just a wee bit jealous of that magistrate's secretary. It was all nonsense what he had said about a wife with child being unable to flirt. Esther could. She could do anything she liked. It had also been nonsense on his part to have mentioned her age. She had no age; she had life!

"Do you think I'd better have a talk with that secretary fellow some day?" he asked.

"No, I don't," she replied.

"You wish to spare him?"

"No, my dear, I want to spare you. You mustn't do anything so unfriendly!"

"Hm!" said August. Here was possibly a chance for him. There had been no chance for him before, and he was sick of insipid inaction in a situation reminiscent of South America. He therefore spoke up and offered personally to settle accounts with the magistrate's secretary.

"No, that'll never go!" said the doctor, with a smile.

"Just maybe drop him a hint?" asked August.

"He'd drop you with more than a hint, I'm afraid. Haha!"

"No, for maybe he wouldn't want to risk it," said August.

"Ho, what could you do?"

"Take and shoot him, for example."

"What?"

"With this very hand you see!"

"August, August! You're always so ready to shoot!" said the doctor, laughing.

"Now how can you say that, Doctor? I've never shot a single soul here in Segelfoss."

The doctor talked him out of it and said: "That's right, August, you knew that daughter of Tobias down in South Parish who was kicked to death by a horse, didn't you?"

August replied disagreeably that he knew them all. They had sold him sheep.

"Kicked as dead as a stone by a horse!"

"Ay, that was too bad," said August. He had it on the tip of his tongue to ask the doctor if he had bled the girl, but he let it go simply to avoid further mention of an unpleasant subject.

The doctor shook his head. "Yes, what a lot of adversity that family has experienced!"

August rose and took his departure. He walked off thoroughly displeased with himself, as anyone might feel who has failed to settle a matter. He had been prepared to go through fire and water, but he had been deprived. What did he have to do with the adversity which had beset Tobias and his family! Wasn't every human being afflicted with troubles of his own! We go on living; ay, we go on living exactly as long with adversity as without. . . . There was a man they had used to call Rikkie—August might have forgotten him, were it not for the fact that he had had but one hand. But that had made no difference to Rikkie, he was all right even if he had lost one of his hands. Had he ever spoken of adversity? Never! One night in a dance hall he had fallen out with Carabao over a girl, and Carabao had paid but little attention to him, as Rikkie had had but one hand. But after they had talked to each other a bit and used language which was neither pleasant nor melodious, Carabao had grown weary of standing there chewing the rag with a mere cripple, and had hauled off and spit in Rikkie's ear in order to show his utter contempt for him. But pardon him, Rikkie had refused to stand for that! His first act had been to shoot off his own ear—the one wet with spit—as he no longer had any use for such an ear. And pardon him

again, the next thing he did was to make a lunge at Carabao. He had but one hand, but one was enough. In fact his stump was enough, for this was hardly soft and plush-like, as was, for example, a fist with flesh on it. Carabao went down and lay there on the floor for a good long time. After a while they had kicked him out of the place, and outside he had asked where he was. He had likewise asked who he was. In short, he had known very little. And Rikkie, on the other hand, was as healthy as ever. He had had but one hand and had likewise lost one of his ears, but no one ever heard him complaining about adversity. It all depends upon the point of view. . . .

CHAPTER THIRTY-FOUR

LIKELY enough Consul Gordon Tidemand would have liked to join in the hunt, but surely he felt no deep craving for the sport. He had probably never fired a shot in his life save for fun, but he realized that hunting was a gentleman's activity and a sport of a serious and noble order. To begin with, the lord was prowling about in the manorial forests, and true it was, Hendrik would return home each evening with ptarmigan slung over his shoulder—several or less—a bird or two, and once there had been four. And during the evening the Consul would be regaled with tales of how these various ptarmigan had been shot, where they had sat, how many there had been in the covey, and how the dogs had disposed themselves. But there was one tale in particular which the lord undertook to tell at table so that everyone should hear and the end of that was, he completely forgot to eat his food. This story was about the old cock ptarmigan at which he had fired both barrels for the reason that it had started up in a direct line with the sun which had blinded him. Oh, how his hunter's honour had stood at stake! But God be praised, he had managed to follow it with his eyes and likely enough he would find it in the morning!

Fru Juliet was kind and listened patiently; she even permitted herself to be perfectly stunned by the thought that the lord could recognize this particular bird out of all the others there were. But Frøken Marna was quite indifferent to his words. When the lord glanced in her direction to see if she too were following him tensely, he found her staring emptily at him as though she had failed to hear a single word. The Consul went to great pains to

perceive each curious fact; he assumed a professional air, he pretended he couldn't keep his fingers still, and, had he been possessed of the ability to turn red and white at will, he would most certainly have made full use of it. Now and then the lord might turn to him and ask: "What would you have done in my place here?" Whereupon the Consul would sigh and say: "That all depends, I hardly dare say!—I say, what would you have done, Marna?" he would ask, turning to his sister.—But the lord had no time to wait for such an answer, he sat there all aglow, exuding sport from every pore. "I had no other choice!" he said. "And I shot. Ay, 'twas swinish for a long range, but I shot!" he shouted.—"Naturally!" the Consul agreed. "That was the only thing you could do! One must never spare a shell!"

When the lord decided to begin hunting above the tree-line and announced his intention of trotting about all day long over vast stretches of waste land, he was willing that someone should drive him up to the lodge and August it was who drove him.

It was Wednesday. On the way down the mountain August stopped the car at the place where his men were working, noted how far they had gone with their work and how far they still had to go, encouraged them by telling them that they had more than a foundation for an out-building down at the druggist's to look forward to—they would soon begin work on a large concrete bank for the Consul.

"Well now, that's fine, boss!" they cried and went at their work with a will so long as he sat there watching.

"Ay, but you've first got to finish up with this fence!" he reminded them.

A trace of wet snow had fallen during the night, hardly enough to mention, but a sure indication that autumn was at hand. It had vanished with the first rays of the sun, but it had been there, none the less.

"Will you be through here in a week?" asked August.
"Ay," they said.

He drove on down to the Manor. The Consul was standing outside waiting for his car to take him down to the office. The Consul was, as usual, fearfully busy, but exquisitely polite. "My ladies have expressed a desire to go out to the downery to pluck eider down. If you could find the time, Altmulig, I wish you might help them to plan the excursion. It's certain that they will wish to invite a few guests. My mother is in charge of arrangements."

August accompanied the Consul as far as the drug-store.

It was still early morning; Fru Holm was in the kitchen, but the druggist and the pharmacist were sitting at breakfast.

"Good morning, August," said the druggist. "Sit down and have a bite to eat with us. Eaten already, eh? My wife will be here at once."

The two gentlemen at table pardoned themselves long enough to finish a conversation.

The druggist: "Yes, I know it's against the law for us to do it, but——"

The pharmacist: "She never sends any money along, either."

"No, but that's all right."

"But what can she possibly do with all that sherry?"

"They serve clam chowder rather frequently there, I believe."

"Yes, but a bottle a day——!"

Fru Holm entered the room. "No—Altmulig!" she cried, quickening at once. "And nothing to eat or drink! Yes, but you'll have a cup of coffee, won't you? That excursion? Twenty-three have been invited. It's all Gordon's fault, he always likes large parties."

August stroked his chin thoughtfully. "We'll have to have a big boat for that many!" he said.

"I can take five in my boat," said the druggist.

August began counting. "And five in the Consul's motor boat. That makes ten. But that leaves thirteen to look out for. We might take the sloop, but we couldn't be sure of a breeze."

They discussed the matter and agreed that one of the seine-boats would easily be large enough to transport all of the guests. August was to round up a crew to row them out on the following day—Thursday at four o'clock.

August rose to his feet.

"Count me as one of your crew!" said the druggist. "And I'll wager you'll find no one who can out-row me!"

"I'm thankful for that," said August. "So that makes two of us."

Fru Holm shook her head. "You mustn't think of rowing, Altmulig!" she said.

The druggist laughed. "You see you have my wife's fondest solicitude, August—which most certainly you deserve!"

"But I believe I'd rather row than walk all the way out to North Parish after two men there."

"To North Parish you shall drive!" Fru Holm rose and went to the telephone, just as though the old man were her ward. She was gone but a few moments and when she returned she reported: "I'm to give you Gordon's greetings and to tell you the car is in the garage!"

"Ay, but—— No, but——"

"Those were his orders," she said.

August to North Parish, driving . . .

He would show them a thing or two out there! To be sure, this was not his machine, but he might easily convey the impression that the Consul and he owned it together.

Moreover, he would have to see about purchasing a car of his own, it was time he, too, owned a machine.

Proudly he drove past the house where the family of the late Solmund resided. Outside Benjamin's house, he blew three blasts on his horn, stepped out of the car, lighted up a cigar and began sauntering about. Benjamin rushed out of the house still innocently chewing on something, so it was possible that he had been sitting there eating. He started to put out his hand to shake hands with August, but promptly abandoned the notion.

Benjamin was the same as ever, sturdy and good-natured. "It's a long time now since we were together building that road, and much has happened since then!"

August had nothing against this lad; he could endure him better than most and had even put himself out for him. "Ho, so this is the cave you live in, is it!" he remarked, staring the house up and down.

"What?" asked Benjamin.

"Is that only one window you've got in that house of yours there?" asked August.

"Ay, one's as many as there is!" replied Benjamin, following August's gaze with his own.

"I don't suppose you've ever seen houses made of glass all the way through?"

"No. Are there such houses?"

"I have lived and had my dwelling in just such a house," said August. "And it was as light inside as it is in God's Heaven, and that you ought to understand for yourself."

"Ay, but we're getting along all right with that one window of ours," said Benjamin satisfied with what he had. "What was I going to say——"

Realizing that it would surely have to do with all the things that had happened since the last time they had met, August interrupted him—— "Is that chum of yours at home?" he asked.

"Ay, so far as I know, he is."

"Good! Then I suppose that you and he can come tomorrow and row our guests over to the downery?"

A long series of questions: whether he really had guests, how many there were, who they were, what downery, although there was only one downery: the Consul's.

August enlightened him: about thirty or forty guests, including a lord from England. "Are you coming?" he asked.

"You'll be needing a pretty big boat," said Benjamin.

"The largest of the seine-boats. Ay. Can I count on you?"

"I imagine so if we make you a promise."

"The largest of the seine-boats, then. You're to come tomorrow morning and scrub up the boat and get her all clean inside. We're thinking of rowing over for dinner. Four o'clock. Understand?"

Benjamin was unimpressed and smiled—— "Ay, that's easy to understand," he said.

"You're to bring your lunch with you, but out at the downery you'll be eating with us."

"Ay ay ay! But much has happened!" said Benjamin. "That Cornelia dead and buried and all that!"

"Ay," August answered absently.

"You didn't follow her to the grave."

"Who, me? No."

"I let her wear that gift of mine around her neck when she went down into the grave. I didn't want to be selfish and deprive her of it."

August, whose interests were confined to matters terrestrial, at length managed to say: "You won't forget to come for those sheep of yours on Michaelmas Day?"

. . . That evening Jørn Mathildesen came rushing down to him to complain that someone was shooting up in the mountains and throwing terror into the sheep.

August calmed his fears. They had only until Saturday

now; then it would be Michaelmas Day and everyone would come for their sheep.

Ay, but they were getting out of control, for there was no longer anything for them to eat, either, and even tomorrow there might be snow. And when folk went about shooting up there in the mountains and frightening all the sheep—they had started off running and made off across the moor toward Sweden.

Well, there was no help for that. But August promised to come up in the morning and look over the situation.

"Who is it that goes about shooting?" asked Jørn, annoyed.

"A grand lord from England."

"Ay, but can't he leave us in peace these few days more?"

"That's what you and I may say," said August. "But you don't know what grand gentlemen these lords from England are. They come next after the King of England, you must understand. And the King of England, he comes next after the Pope. And ahead of the Pope there is only God Himself."

"But if you'd only talk to him and tell him——"

Oh fiddlesticks! August couldn't go on listening to such chatter . . .

Thursday morning he drove the lord up to the lodge again. But it was a wretched morning, a lowering sky, frequent showers of rain. "A ragged morning," was how the lord described it. Hendrik and the dog were sitting in the back seat, both depressed, not because of the rain, but because their lord and master seemed depressed. His mood was quite contagious. No, the lord would not hunt today, he would merely go looking for those two ptarmigan which had flown west the day before, and after that he would return home. It so happened that he had some "accursed writings to answer," and after that he was to go to a place they called a downery . . .

August turned and drove back down to the Manor. The Consul was waiting for him and promptly inquired whether he had arranged everything for the coming excursion.

"Ay, everything in order!"

"But possibly we'll have no weather for it?"

"Ay, the finest autumn weather!"

"Good, Altmulig!" said the Consul, smiling. "Jump in, if you're going into town!"

August rode down to the Store with the Consul, made a few purchases consisting of tobacco, coffee and cakes for his shepherds, went down to see how the two lads were getting along with their cleaning up of the seine-boat, and at length made his way up to his mountain pasturage, choosing a short cut by way of the church.

Jørn and Valborg were as happy children over the gifts they received, and gave him their hands in thanks. They were likewise rejoicing over the fact that they had heard no more than a couple of shots today and those far off in the distance. But the sheep had become more and more restless these last few days, for they had now completely run out of forage.

But August had thought of a solution to this problem: they were to abandon the mountain pasturage and lead the flocks round the mountain lake. There were vast stretches of wilderness rich with grass about the shores of the lake; he had seen them on a walk he had taken in the course of the summer. But the question was how to get this enormous flock of sheep from one pasturage into another.

Oh, but that was nothing at all, cried Valborg and called to the sheep. The creatures immediately began streaming up to her, came crowding about her and all but bowled her over; then when she moved forward, they all followed along behind her, and those farthest away began loping to catch up with the procession. Valborg was able to utter no more than a hasty order to her husband to

fetch the food and with that she was off with a thousand sheep trailing along in her wake.

So now that question was settled . . .

Singular weather, almost like the weather preceding an earthquake. August sat down. It felt good to rest a while.

Actually, he was out of his element up there. Looking about, he found himself in the midst of an utterly foreign world, a world of riotous peaks and rocky crags, a static confusion of monstrous grey mountains. What use did he have for such a world? He was a man of action, a trader. Up here, as there was nothing which moved—neither bush nor straw—there were no sounds to be heard, only dead silence which crushed him with its weight. Here he sits between his ears and all he hears is emptiness. An amusing conception, indeed!

On the sea there were both motion and sound, something for the ear to feed upon, a chorus of waters. Here nothingness meets nothingness and the result is zero, not even a hole. Enough to make one shake one's head, utterly at a loss.

He did not give the matter much thought; the notion had merely occurred to him, but, as he was somewhat fanciful by nature, it was probable that for a moment his imagination had got the better of him. Such might well have been the case. And if this silence had any meaning at all, it was probably this: I am emptiness! Of all things in the world I am emptiness! Known only as that which is contained in something, a power, an impossibility which no one possesses and no one has sent, but a delirium. I am emptiness!

He has toiled no end, expended his energy. Nor has this climb up the mountain been such an easy task for him. He is an old man and he may be tired, perhaps he is dozing . . .

A puff of wind sweeps over the mountain, something nearby moves; he glances up but immediately lowers his

gaze again. He smacks his lips as though tasting of something, and perhaps his thoughts are off at sea again, his proper home. It is the dog watch and he is standing at the wheel. A clear passage and a calm sea, moon and stars . . . ay, and God, it seems, is at home, for all his heavenly lights are blazing. The dog watch? Oh, the angel watch, no less! Simply that the moon is waxing and each night growing more full is joy unbounded for the man there at the wheel. He hums, he is on good terms with himself, he is bound for a distant port where he will go ashore in a red vest. No wonder that the human being is so reluctant to die, for the glories of this earth can not be imagined to exist in any other corner of the universe, not even in Heaven itself . . .

Two sharp shoulders of wind strike against the mountain and the sky swiftly darkens. He looks up and realizes at once that there will shortly be a downpour. All right, let it come! What does he care! He will merely stroll over to that cave of Jørn's and Valborg's and crawl inside till it's over. Probably no more than a shower. A highly amusing adventure, for once in his life, to go through a storm in the mountains—how many he had experienced during his years at sea!

No longer that gentle soundlessness now; a rush fills the air, like the flowing of the Ganges or the Amazon. The rush increases to a roar—heavy, massive—and the darkness thickens. Some of these thrusts of wind are, in truth, right lusty, they mean business—thanks, wind, come ahead! Far off in the distance, perhaps as far north as Senjen, there is a faint sound as though of a drum, hardly audible, and yet—it is as though a drummer were tuning his drum, carefully tightening his drum-head.

After a little, he is aware of a flash of lightning, and the drum seems nearer than ever, fully taut now, tuned fully up to pitch. And well, that it is in tune, for the music is about to begin.

A flash of lightning and a crash of thunder, a bare five or six miles away. Things are becoming serious now. Nature is not to be trifled with any longer. R-r-r-r-r-r-r——! Ugh, how forbidding! But soon it is even worse, when a pelting rain cuts loose amidst a series of lightning flashes and thunder claps and all the terrors of the storm tear the sky to shreds and spread ruin throughout the heavens, when Nature in all her fury swoops down upon the earth and scourges every mountain. "Hey, hey—the devil!" he mumbles, in order to keep up his courage. However, he has grown a bit pale and there is something of a religious look on his face, as he crawls back into the cave. A thorough storm, and no mistake! It reminds him of the time down around the Cape, when the Lord had lost his patience and had simply run amok. Remember that time? Seven days and seven nights of it! Fifty-seven lives! . . . Lightning? No, fire! A voyage through sheer flame—thunder so powerful that we fell to our knees beneath the weight of it—no sense in it whatever, downright unlawful! And if, for a moment, we dreamed that the captain had no word of command for us, we naturally were most eternally mistaken. For truth to tell, that was no weather to try talking in—we couldn't even hear the words from our own mouths. And besides, what was there to talk about? What commands were there to be given? We certainly couldn't do anything about anything. But the captain, he fussed and fumed, and hopped about, and had his revolver in his hand the whole time, and kept working his lips like a deaf mute, and a pitiful sight he was—that much I'll say to this day. A captain doesn't hop about when he wishes to give a command, he simply points his finger. And that's why he was such a pitiful sight. But when there isn't sense left in the world and it's impossible to hear a single word that's spoken, a man is likely to be something of a puzzle, even to himself. Mark my words every time! . . . Well, we got hold of him and bound him three times

round before we let him go, and he didn't do anything to help us, either, although it was for his own good that we tied him up. His wife took good care of him this time but he was so tightly bound that he couldn't do a thing to her, though he had managed to shoot a man . . .

The sky brightens off to the north and the rain lets up. Really not such a bad cave after all, this—both dry and weather-tight . . .

Yes sir, that's just what he did—he shot a man. But it wasn't the mate. Oh, she had not been like she ought to have been, and all of us knew about that. And there was the Old Man, so completely out of his head, that he was wanting to sail us all to the bottom! Stupid of an old man to get himself all worked up over a mere youngster such as she—it should have been me! On all great ocean liners there must be a good many secret corners, outside of staterooms and bunks and other likely places, so he telephoned down from the bridge for us to go and see who was there and there and there—— “I've got to know!” he said. Very well, he never found out from me the things that were going on—but he found out about them from Chas and Axel and the nigger and Pit and all the rest. Whoever happened to be on watch. He had no peace of mind—— “Go there and see—there and there and there!” he would say. Day after day, just like that. His revolver in his hand all the time. But after all, he only killed one man. That was Pit. He was nothing at all, though, and there were still fifty-six of us left, but even so he got himself into a mess and was accused of making a mistake. At the hearings he was there in uniform, buttons, braid and belt and all—everything of gold—ay, even his whistle was gold. He shed no tears, simply stood there, erect and well-shaven—sixty-two years old. The Chief testified that there was plenty of reason and good sense at the bottom of his desperation, and the whole engine-room was on his side, in fact every one aboard was for him, so the killing

could certainly not have amounted to anything. But the Old Man got up and stood there. "No," he said. "I offer no reasonable defence! It just came over me, insanity! I'll take my medicine!" Ah, there was a captain who was something. . . .

The shower is over and he goes out. Drenched mountains and countless gushing rivulets, the air chilly, some sign of wind. He begins climbing to a certain point of vantage he has selected, slips and slides over the wet ground, but refuses to give up, to spare himself, at length reaches his goal and peers off into the distance. The sheep are far away now; like pin-pricks which do not move, and that is a sign that they are quietly at graze.

Four o'clock. The finest of weather again, no warmth to the sun, but there is sun, and the assembled party have clad themselves for the cold.

They step into the seine-boat. The druggist's wife, forever practical, stands there counting heads: the postmaster and his wife are missing, the pastor and his wife are missing—now what could be the matter! Gordon Tide-mand is displeased that his friend, the lord, must wait, but the lord himself is perfectly content to be where he is for the moment and amazes everyone by expressing a desire to row.

"You want to row?" asks Benjamin, at a loss to understand.

"Ay, ay! Row!" says the lord.

The pastor and his wife appear. Poor souls, they have had the longest way to come and the lady is unhappy over the fact that they have thus delayed the party.

"You have not delayed us in the least," says Fru Holm. "The postmaster and his wife have not as yet arrived."

After continuing to wait for a time, the druggist offers a suggestion—"Why not go ahead with the seine-boat? I can just as well wait here for Hagen and his wife, for I'm planning to row my own boat, anyway."

Decided! The seine-boat pushes off and the lord sits there gripping a pair of those colossal oars and using them like any able hand. The devil and all! Frøken Marna, for the first time, gazes upon him with genuine interest.

Arriving at the island, the party alights from the boat, helpful gentlemen carry the food and the beer ashore, Fru Holm points and gives orders, and it is obvious at once that she is the only one who knows anything about the nests and the down—even her son has not been here since the days of his childhood.

The birds are absent now, but behind them they have left an odd little world of their own—a summer resort of wildly scattered dwellings. The houses consist of four stones, one for each of the three walls and one for the roof. "Heavens!" cry the ladies. "Heavens, how odd it all is. We've never before seen anything like it!" They reach their hands into these bird houses, take out the down and place it in the large paper sacks from the Segelfoss Store. They do not always bring out pure eider down, however; sometimes they get but a handful of litter. Fru Holm says: "If any of you gentlemen come across a roof or a wall which has fallen, you will be good enough to replace it so that our little eider duck city here may be in good repair for next summer!" The lord from England has traveled far and wide and has seen all manner of bird houses, but—— "These beat all Satan, they do!" he says.

The postmaster and Fru Hagen arrive in the druggist's boat. They offer no elaborate apologies, merely mention the fact they are late. Fru Hagen is charming and petite in a snug little winter coat. They each receive a paper sack and Fru Holm requests her husband to look carefully to see whether one or another nest has not been overlooked by those who have gone on before.

Thus the original three remain together the entire time. But Postmaster Hagen is not a man to eavesdrop on every word the other two utter and, as a matter of fact, he wanders far off by himself, gathers up down in his sack

and makes himself generally useful. Now and then he turns back, calls attention to this or that which has struck him as interesting, and continues on his way, alone. Thus, since there is no one to overhear their conversation, Fru Hagen and the druggist are left free to talk all the nonsense they choose.

"No, I think you're very much mistaken," says Fru Hagen, "when you say it is pleasant here. And I simply can not understand how anyone is able to endure such a life. But I suppose you understand it perfectly?"

"Yes, my own case, for example. I can not get away."

"But you could, of course."

"No. I am married and I'm building a house and have made definite arrangements for my future."

"But you could certainly leave if you chose," she repeated obstinately. "Things equally mad have been heard of."

"What's that?" he asks, astounded.

"Yes, leave, I mean. By the first ship. And I with you!"

"Well—now you've said something! Yes, of course, in such a way—odd that it didn't occur to me——"

"Hahaha!" she laughed. "I had you frightened that time!"

"At the prospect of achieving so gloriously attractive a traveling companion? No—offer me something really hard!"

"My dear Druggist Holm," she said. "You have lost the art of banter, I fear. It is only I, the forsaken one, who may be said to retain the gift. 'Will you leave with me?' you ought to have asked. Whereupon, I should have replied: 'No—he wouldn't stand for it, you see! And besides, I should have to be in love with you!'"

Holm, curtly: "But you see I know you are not."

"And are you thus so annoyed because of it? Before, you used to be amazed over it and would shout: 'The devil you say!'"

"Hahaha! Did I?"

"No, you've forgotten how to flirt, Druggist, and you have forgotten what I have told you. How can a person as washed out as I am be in love!"

Holm was silent. There was nothing more to be said. Moreover, it appeared that she was becoming emotional. He observed with relief that the postmaster was approaching again and he resolved this time to hold onto him. "By the way, Postmaster," he said. "That was certainly a lovely carpet you chose for us! We are both enormously pleased with it."

Ow! Too late the druggist realized his blunder, for it was true, was it not, that the postmaster did not wish to have it known that he had made the plans for the house or chosen the carpet? He had winced a bit, too, at the druggist's remark, but he was quick to clear himself: "I?" he said. "No, I simply thought—since I was standing there nearby—surely you mustn't think a thing about it! See here, Alfhild, there's a cold wind blowing. I believe you should fasten the belt about your coat."

"All right, but you must help me, then!" she said.

After he had fastened the belt about her, she suddenly hugged him, took his arm and drew herself close to him as though she had some urgent need of him. And with that she guided their steps back to the boat.

The druggist walked on and joined the main party. Some of them had done splendidly and showed him a full sack, others—as, for example, the pharmacist and the magistrate's secretary—had confined themselves, for the most part, to repairing nests. Fru Juliet expressed herself as hardly having the heart to rob these nests of all their down, pausing as she did to consider that next year the birds would only have to pluck themselves again—"Isn't it just as I say, Altmulig?" she asked.

"Pardon," says August, "but the birds always pluck themselves every year anyway, after throwing out what old down they find left in the nest."

The pastor's wife had been ambitious and was second

to lead the party. First honours, naturally had been taken by that bright little lass of Davidsen's who helped him with the paper; she had, it seems, two sacks full of down and had already started a third.

"You shall have the first prize!" the Consul remarked to her with a nod, and immediately turned to Juliet for advice as to what they should give out as prizes.

And in this wise was the downery plucked clean.

But two persons there were who were behaving in a most singular manner—Frøken Marna and the lord from England. They had gone off by themselves and had actually sat down together. It was perhaps not so astonishing that Marna herself should be shirking all physical exertion, for thus sluggish and indolent she had always been, but when it happened that that tameless Englishman had come and flung himself down at her feet, what could it have meant but that he had had something important to say to her!

And, as a matter of fact, he had.

Yes, the lord had, in a way, capitulated. There he had gone now for two or three long weeks, trusting right along to bring her to heel English fashion, by showing not the least bloody sign of interest in her and by simply leaving her to herself. He would arouse her interest by chattering on about sport and by being at all times thoroughly British, by gradual steps seeking to discover her and to discover if she had discovered him. A faulty technique, for in her he had run afoul of a form of resistance which was not resistance at all, but simply pure unadulterated indifference. Whether he spoke or was silent, whether he was present or absent, mattered little or nothing to her. A remarkable example of incuriosity which, in its English form, is priggishness and factitious phlegm, but which in her was as natural as her skin. It was an indifference for his person and his speech which could in no way be associated with purposeful frigidity. It really had no purpose,

it was too far removed from artifice. Gad, then, if he hadn't come up against an unusual type! She had begun to plague his thoughts. Actually, though accidentally, she had aroused the Briton in him to prove himself; moreover she was beautiful, the wench, and now and then she appeared to be possessed of at least some latent warmth.

When he observed that she had unceremoniously walked a little way and sat down he was led to follow her. They were not strangers to each other; they lived in the same house together, had fished for trout together, had eaten at the same table. And furthermore his mental attitude was a bit changed today; he was a mite less supercilious.

He begged permission to sit down beside her.

"Please do!"

"Wonderful bird city, not so?" he asked with a sweeping gesture which included the entire island.

"Yes, swinish grand," she replied and looked down with a smile on her face.

After a time the conversation improved and actually amounted to something. Not that he came right out and proposed to her—by no means that!—but he had become somewhat more human than usual, began acting natural, in spite of his incomplete grasp of the language. He complained for the first time over the fact that he was unable to express every thought he desired. "Do you know English?" he suddenly asked.

"No."

Ay, but she'd learn it like lightning when she came to England.

"I'm not coming to England," said Marna.

Not? Why not? Ay, that she must! he urged her. He explained that they had a place, no, not he, but his father—he had a factory and made different things—a place with a garden. "Gordon has been there, Marna! And you must also be there! No, not horses and sheep runs and that, only autos and that, and not yacht, no, no, only

ordinary things. I say, don't you know any English at all?"

"No," said Marna. "Only 'love you' and 'sweetheart' and 'eks mi nash.'"

It was now his turn to smile and drop his gaze. Ay, she was natural and she had said it so prettily. He didn't know Norwegian either. "Hell, isn't it!" he asked.

No, he did very well with it, she thought.

A refreshing and amusing chap, that Englishman; he did not translate directly from his own language. Instead he used what he had learned of a northern peasant dialect of Norwegian, actually thought in it, stumbled along in it and seldom allowed himself to get stuck. He had also learned Spanish in South America and had learned a smattering of Arabic. But French, it was *noget godt Skit!* No, he knew nothing, but that Gordon, he was so clever and all, knew everything, learned and learned.

"But you're a lord," said Marna.

Lord—he? No, kiss me tomorrow! Lord? No, but a manufacturer. They made steel goods. That is, his father did. Himself, he was an ordinary middling man.

"You rowed well," she said.

Rowed? With such oars? No. But when she came to England she would see! He was a great rower!

The Consul calls them to beer and sandwiches. They rise and join the party. The lord continues to talk.

When it was time to leave for home, there was a roll-call—yes, for Fru Holm remembered that once they had rowed off and left an engaged couple behind on the island. The couple had not been missed until the party was well on their way back to town and it had been necessary to turn round and row back after them . . .

This time it was Fru Hagen who was missing.

They waited for a time and then began to call. Odd manners on her part to have wandered off at such a time!

Certain ones walked out across the island and called, returned to the boat and asked: "Has she turned up yet?" . . . The postmaster races up to the island's topmost point and calls.

What in the world is the meaning of this? Who saw her go and which way had she gone? It really wasn't right of her to have done such a thing! Some excuse her and explain that Fru Hagen is so wretchedly near-sighted, she might have run afoul of a fissure of rock. Yes, but there are no fissures here, not a single fissure anywhere on the island. And were she held fast, she would certainly be calling for help.

The postmaster comes racing down from his lookout, asks if she has come, doesn't wait for an answer but immediately makes off along the beach with terror gnawing at his heels.

"Altmulig, what are we going to do?" asks the Consul.

"Ay, we'll just have to row out and look for her," August answers consolingly, exactly as though she were sitting on some rock in the sea.

He takes Benjamin with him in the druggist's boat and begins rowing along the shore. Now and then they call out and raise their oars from the water and listen for an answer. The water is deep all about the island; in some places the cliff drops sheer from above, in others lie the remains of some rock slide, huge stones covered with seaweed and jellyfish . . . The island was anything but small. It took them a full hour to row around it. Darkness was at hand.

The seine-boat rowed home.

Four men were left behind on the island; two by two, they took turns cruising about in the druggist's boat, kept it up as long as there was light, and at length were compelled to give up and wait for dawn. The doctor had been left there in the event that there should be need for resuscitation, August because he was a sailor and a gen-

eral handy man, the lord because he was the man he was—a clever fellow who could row like a bear—and furthermore because he had demanded to be left. The fourth member of the watching party was the postmaster himself, poor soul. He climbed again to the island's summit and remained there for some time although it was too dark for him to see anything.

It might prove necessary to drag for her. The anchor there in the druggist's boat might serve very well—the boat hook too. If more complete apparatus were needed, they could row back to town after it.

But they found her with the anchor—August and the postmaster. They were rowing along the north shore of the island. Suddenly August felt that the anchor had clung fast to something in the water, something which yielded and moved with the boat. Yes, for one prong of the anchor had hooked itself to the belt about her coat.

"She was so near-sighted!" the postmaster said. "She must have fallen over the edge."

Twelve hours in the water—there was no question of resuscitation.

CHAPTER THIRTY-FIVE

FRIDAY.

But life must carry on . . .

The carpenters working on the druggist's new house are hammering and sawing and planing away just as they were doing yesterday before death visited the town. The gardener Steffen has at last got together a crew of threshers and the rumble of his machine is heard from one end of the Manor to the other. Boldemand and his fellow-workmen are drilling the last holes; they will be finished by quitting time today and tomorrow they will set up the ironwork. All who have flags in town are flying them at half-mast, but life must carry on . . . Yes, even the post-master is keeping his office hours as usual, hoping thus to conquer his grief. What else may the poor fellow do! But it is otherwise with the lord from England; he will not go shooting and making a great noise today, partly because he has been up all night and partly because he feels a trace of respect for the tragedy which has come to Segelfoss.

He encounters Frøken Marna—she has become so much easier to meet, so much more ready with a word since yesterday. He encounters her in the hall just as he is leaving his room after having slept a couple of hours. She seems, in a way, thawed out, her beauty now fresh and luxuriant; why, she might even be thought capable, after all, of coming to England some day. And well she might! She invites him down to late breakfast and, together with Juliet, she listens raptly when he tells of his night on the island and of the finding of the body in the morning. The lord shakes

his head and says that sad it was indeed to have listened to the postmaster.

"What did he say?"

"No, not many words. 'Young person,' he said, 'and so musical and merry and happy.' But she was so near-sighted, he said. She has stumbled—stumbled—and not seen it herself. Frightful! What is it you have on your nose?"

Both ladies start up, clutch at their noses and fail to understand.

He smiles. "No, no!" he says. "What it was she did not have on her nose?"

"Oh—*briller*?"

"No no——"

"*Næseklemme*?"

"Ay ay, *næseklemme*! Nose glasses! He had begged her to use nose glasses, always, but that she wouldn't. She had it on a string."

Marna smiled—— "Uf, I thought I had got something on my nose!" she said.

Fru Juliet is unable to refrain from smiling. "I was just on the point of rushing to a mirror!" she smiled.

"Such foolishness as I talk!" said the lord.

No, that he certainly did not! On the contrary, it was a miracle how well he spoke; and the ladies simply couldn't get over it how much Norwegian he had acquired in the course of no more than two months up in Finmark.

No, nor had he either, said the lord. *Ak* no, far from it! That came from a day when he had lived twelve years of his childhood in Durban and there he lay aboard Norwegian ships and talked Norwegian both early and late. No, that which he had learned in Finmark was only to brush up his Norwegian from Durban. And even so, he didn't know today the half part of what he had known then. So he was altogether not a miracle . . .

Nevertheless, they considered him remarkable for all the things he could say.

On the island yesterday when he had talked with Marna he couldn't say anything.

Marna slowly flushed.

But he could perhaps have permission to come back in the winter and learn more?

"You'll always be welcome!" said Fru Juliet and extended him her hand.

He seemed so human, so natural now—something of the Durban harbour lad had returned to the surface, he had lost his English affectation. He made no mention of that cock ptarmigan now, for he was sitting there in a shirt he had slept in and his necktie was down from the collar.

Marna managed to say: "Well, so there's to be no hunting today, then?"

"Ay, this afternoon," he replied. That was what he was there for. But that old man was not to get up and drive him . . .

What, was old man August not to be aroused by afternoon? Why, he was already up and, for that matter, God knew whether he had as much as been in bed. That very moment he was hammering and doing a bit of carpenter work out in the smokehouse, was busy laying a bit of new floor right there inside the door. Life must carry on, even when there was death. That old floor board had served its time and was worn out and squeaked every time one laid one's foot on it, but now the floor would be as good as new and all ready for next year's salmon smoking. August was a man of forethought, he would get rid of that abominable squeak.

Afterwards he walks down into town and, as usual, visits the pier—ay, and the engine for the sloop *Soria* had arrived at last! He nodded, for it had arrived as he

had expected on the north-bound steamer that very morning. It had taken several telegrams, the beastly thing, but there it stood at last, strong and powerful, a thing of steel, a baby elephant with delicate wheels inside, the stamp of the manufacturer outside. A bit of oil and she would be ready to go. The problem now was to get it aboard the sloop, but today was Friday and tomorrow, Michaelmas Day, when he would deliver back the sheep. Monday he would begin mounting the engine, a delicate piece of work, but he could manage it all right, don't you worry about that!

He finds a tarpaulin and covers over the engine, fastens the covering in place with a length of rope about the whole, for it is not his wish to have every Tom, Dick and Harry fingering that splendid new machine of his. Ho, wouldn't Skipper Olsen be amazed, though, to see the sloop gliding along with no sails bent and no wind blowing! And the Consul might be counted on to say: "Yes, Altmulig, you are certainly a man with ideas, no question about that!" And August would answer with all the soul that was in him: "Now when the Herr Consul gets word about herring he can have the sloop there on the dot!"

In the street he meets his old friend the shopkeeper, the fellow with whom he had played cards last spring. It was always the same with that shopkeeper: a large account which he was unable to pay, wife and children so naked for clothes they couldn't so much as leave the house, and couldn't August help him out again?

August pulls a wry smile.

"Just this once! God will pay you back for it!"

"I haven't been to the bank yet today," August says and passes him by.

"Aren't we ever going to have a little evening of cards again?" begs the shopkeeper.

Oh, it was all so long ago since then! That business was now quite dead and forgotten! Something to do with a

Russian Bible and a wedding ring. Since then fate had intervened with money from Polden, with a bowler hat and a white collar, with the mere bagatelle of a thousand or two head of sheep! . . . August cuts off and steps into the Segelfoss Store.

The shopkeeper dogs his trail.

In the store many folk are assembled; Hendrik is there because he is off duty and need not go shooting with the lord until afternoon; Karel and Gina i Roten are there, buying yarn of several different colours. A pair of housewives look on with envy at the transaction, but they smirk and say that such colours should really be made by God himself. And what now was Gina thinking of doing with all this finery in the world, what had she decided in that head of hers?

"Ay," says Gina, "'tis so now as I'm to set up a wee bit of a web. What ever the kind may be!"

"A good bit of a web it will be, as it seems to us!"

"I'm come so out of clothes for a skirt," says Gina. "And if for nothing else, 'twas to carry home hay straws in as I was always to borrow a skirt. But pity 'tis, so should the little ones have a rag as will hide their nakedness there in church. So it came as I had to set me up a web, poor and bad off as we are."

"You poor!" cry the other women. "You as have earned such big money for singing and playing in the theatre as we've heard, and drained out a big pond on your land for a cow or two. No, 'tis not for the likes of you to take poverty on that tongue of yours and say bad off for a name."

Gina has no objections to being held up as something grand, and she invites the other women to look carefully at the yarn and to pass it through their fingers. The women are shy and reluctant, they feel themselves unworthy to be awarded so great an honour, but Gina is gracious toward them and asks their advice with respect

to the colours. "I've thought of yellow and blue and red and green and so I've been looking again at yellow and blue and red and green—so what do you think about it?"

"'Tis not for us to understand and see through the half part of anything so fine!" say the women hypocritically and themselves run through the list of primary colours.

To them these colours meant perhaps a rainbow or a picture of a child or a dream. Fifty of such women represented all the housewives of their neighbourhood. They knew each other and talked together, nearly all of them were mothers, none owned more than the others. The rain leaked through their turf roofs at home, and food with them was sometimes scarce, all this, and yet— They knew of no better condition, and thus were they tortured by no sense of privation. Days and nights passed in their neighbourhood as in others, and they both envied and admired each other, quarreled and were helpful to each other. There was a little good and a little bad in all of them. They were human.

They fell to discussing the postmaster's wife. "Ay, and shouldn't I know her, though!" says Gina. "Once she was out to see us and kinder and gentler than one of God's angels, she was. And we were together that evening in the theatre when I sang and that Karel he played for all the quality folk—ay, and there we were together and she laughed the whole evening long at some joke the druggist was having. And we didn't know then that she would be dead and go down into the grave before any of us others."

"Ay, so it is, and so it is!" jabbars one of the other women. But she is first and foremost concerned with her own affairs, and as she is fearful that she will run short of feed for her creatures during the winter ahead, she says to Gina: "An eternal shame it is to be at you for a skirt before it's a web and sewed and all that, and ashamed of myself I am, but——"

"The skirt you shall have!" replies Gina, proud that now, for the first time in her life, she is in a position to loan a handsome skirt for another to carry home hay . . .

August really has nothing in mind to purchase, he has ducked into the store merely to avoid that small dealer. But he thinks quickly and asks for cigars. "The best you have!" he orders.

The merchant lacks all sense of shame and again comes at August for help.

August repeats that he has not yet been to the bank.

The man pulls a ring from his finger—his wedding ring! Couldn't August possibly lend him a bit on that? Genuine gold, look at the stamping! It was really the last thing in the world he would care to part with but—when one is so up against it, you know . . .

So many stand there watching! Well, August is no man to take a mortgage on something when he is of a mind to fling out some money. "Go to sea with that ring of yours!" he commands, snatches out his wallet and tosses the man a large red bill. What else could he have done with so many looking on! Nor does he fail to thrust aside the hand extended to him in thanks.

Clerks and stock boys titter throughout the store, but the merchant has no sense of shame and he does not leave the place. He has got the money he asked for and he is saved, but at that he turns to Karel i Roten and says: "You don't trade with me in my place any more."

"What?" returns Karel. "Dear man, but you carry no yarn there, do you?"

"No, but I carry all the other things you need and could mention. And the fact is, we were baptised together and all that, but you don't seem to remember that!"

He arouses the animosity of everyone there in the store, but he is too bitter in his heart to realize it. Isn't he striving as hard as he can? Yes, but his enterprise draws no customers. Folk do not forsake the other merchants in

town and come hammering on his counter. There is more to business and trade and turnover than that! Why go to the Segelfoss Store after store yarn for a fancy skirt? In an earlier day people used to spin and dye their own tough yarn and surely they got more service out of it. But when a small dealer does not carry store goods, factory products and gew-gaws for women, folk simply do not come flocking to him in droves. In fact they don't buy a single thing from him. No. And in the end the small dealer is starved out. Yes, happy journey to him!

He is bitter and talks no end of foolishness, and all the things he is unable to say are fully legible upon his careworn face. But everyone has his troubles, the small dealer along with the rest . . .

Suddenly, before quitting the halls of his mighty competitor, he manages to utter the startling statement that he has cut the price of soft soap and American bacon!

August glances at his watch and returns home. Quite by chance he discovers the doctor's wife far up the street by the corner bakery. She has been inside making purchases. He raises his hat high off his head to her and yes, she spies him, and nods back at him several times. Little Fru Esther, so she has got at last what she wants! And why shouldn't she have a little daughter now and then if she likes! And as for Doctor Lund, though he is otherwise a splendid chap, he had better look out, for unlawful it is to . . .

August has been up all night and a midday nap would do him no end of good. However, he has no time for a nap; he must go above to his shepherds and arrange with them to return the flocks to their regular mountain pasturage, for tomorrow will be Michaelmas Day. He eats a hasty lunch and observes from his watch that he will just about have time. Out in the yard he comes upon the Consul, walking in from the smokehouse. August nods, for it

would not be right to stalk straight past the Consul without some form of greeting.

"I heard from my ladies that you've been doing a bit of carpentry out in the smokehouse this morning," says the Consul, "and I thought I'd step out and have a look at your work."

"I simply put in a length of floor board," said August.

"Splendid! You're always arranging and fixing things up for me, and I give you my hearty thanks, Altmulig! By the way, in regard to that bank addition of ours—I'm not sure—perhaps, even though it will prove more expensive—still, I believe we should make it of concrete."

August's face brightens at once. "Exactly the right material!" he says.

"Concrete through and through, then," says the Consul, with a bit of a swagger. "I've thought the whole thing over. Somewhat more expensive as to initial investment, but more permanent and, before all else, more secure. And a bank should be both, I believe."

August was aroused at once over the thought of beginning work. "Ay," he said. "Those lads of mine, they'll be finished with the road fence tomorrow. Then all they'll have ahead of them will be a bit of a foundation for that outhouse of the druggist's. But just as soon as they're through down there, they can start in on the bank."

"Good, but aren't we getting pretty far along in the autumn?"

"Ay," answers August, "but we'll get the building up this autumn. If we have a bit of frost, we'll use salt."

"Salt?"

"Salt in the water."

"Well, of all the things you know!" exclaims the Consul.

"Oh, I've done one thing or another in my day," said August. "I've built huge concrete piers and warehouses and no less than three churches."

The Consul was surely afraid that August might be led to continue in this vein, so he said: "Well, I'm wasting your time, Altmulig! By the way, haven't you had any sleep today? Yes, but you must be tired after last night. It was you, I understand, who found the body."

"No, the postmaster himself was along."

The Consul shook his head. "A pitiful tragedy indeed!"

"Ay," said August. "But I've been in two or three earthquakes, and in one earthquake I was in, a great huge crack opened up in the earth and three thousand persons fell into it."

The Consul again afraid of what might follow, asked: "Where are you bound for now, Altmulig?"

"Up to those sheep of mine. They're up there on this side of the lake now, but I must see about getting them back to their regular pasturage by tomorrow, the day they're to be given back."

"Are you going to give them back?" asked the Consul absently.

"For winter feeding."

The Consul must have had something on his mind to ask his old *altmuligmand*, but now he glances at his watch and says: "I've arranged with my English friend to go after him in the car at five o'clock."

August considers it a pity that the Consul himself should go for the lord.

"No, that was the arrangement," says the Consul. "I say, will you remember to take down the flag when you return home this evening."

"Ay ay, sir!" . . .

August walks hastily up the road. He meets his workmen who are on the way down. "Well, we're through with the holes, we are, boss!" they say.

"It's about time!" the boss answers. "Tomorrow we'll

put up the fence," he reminds them and continues on his way.

He arrives at the lodge, turns to the left and begins walking along the edge of the lake. God knows, he may be obliged to walk some distance before he encounters those shepherds of his, for the lake is large. After walking briskly for some time, he raises his hands to his mouth and calls . . . An answering call from some distance away . . . Ho, so those good shepherds, Jørn and Valborg, have not yet begun their return march about the lake, eh! They must start back at once, then, for the way is long and the animals must not be driven at too rapid a pace—they must graze along at their ease, that they may be well-fed upon returning to their old pasturage on the morrow.

"How's this?" calls August when still some distance away. "Haven't you been thinking of turning back with the sheep?"

"Ay," answers Jørn. He rises from the ground, touches his hat in greeting, and seats himself again. Thus calmly does he take the situation. "Ay, we've been thinking of it. But it was that Valborg," he says. "She hated to take the creatures away from here where there's so much for them to eat. And will you just look and see how round and fat they are from all they've eaten!"

August slumps down on the ground beside Jørn. He has perhaps walked too briskly and over-taxed himself; moreover, the evening was long. Even so, an odd feeling seems gnawing away at him, a feeling he can not shake off. What can it be? Then suddenly he turns to Jørn—"Wasn't that a crow that just flew by?" he asks.

"Where?" asks Jørn. "I didn't see any crow."

"Didn't you, either, Valborg?"

"What's that? A crow? No."

August fell to thinking. What was the matter with him? He wasn't so dead for sleep that he was seeing imaginary

crows, was he! No, he had seen it with his own eyes. He looks at Jørn Mathildesen and there the fellow sits toying with a twig in his fingers, and there sits Valborg, as well, none other than Valborg from Øira, knitting away on a stocking—his eyes do not deceive him, for the stocking has been rolled up tight and made quite short, and Valborg's steel knitting needles are glittering in the sun. Hm, as though he hadn't seen a crow!

"You didn't see it when it flew right by here?" he asks obstinately.

"A crow? No, we saw no crow," answers Jørn.

"East or west?"

Valborg begins to take fright—"You make me feel creepy," she says.

"Nonsense!" August replies. "But what I can't understand is what business a crow has got so far up here in the mountains."

"No," says Valborg. "Unless it's on Friday business."

August gazes at her indulgently. "That's all a lot of silly talk about a crow being a Friday bird and that it goes out on errands of mischief of a Friday. I never heard of such a thing anywhere else but here, although I've been in all the leading crow-countries of the world. Why couldn't the same thing be said about ostriches or penguins which I've also seen aplenty. And aren't both the crow and Friday in the hand and the care of the Lord?"

He offers a rebuttal to Valborg's argument, reduces it to dust, and says that she's got her mind all cluttered up with witchcraft and Freemasonry. "I myself have been hooted at and cursed for a Friday's child," he says, "but I've been through something like four thousand Fridays in my time and I'm still here to tell the tale!"

"I only said it," mumbles Valborg.

Jørn, however, has something more important on his mind. Remarkable about that poor neglected man, once given a definite task to perform, he has proved both re-

liable and conscientious. And now he has changed from the cast-off clothing he had picked up here and there and is attired in regular work clothes purchased from the store in town. He feels like a new man in them, feels himself raised from the dust and suddenly made over into a human being. Tomorrow he will stand there and receive many folk who will come to call for their sheep, and he does not shrink from the thought of it!

But Jørn has also come to think a bit about the future, something he has not done thus far before. "Ay, and tomorrow, 'tis Michaelmas Day and all that," he says, "so you'll be having no further use for us, I suppose?"

August is August, and far be it from him to let any of his people go without a mouthful of bread to depend on. When had it ever been heard that he had? "I'll see that you get something to do," he replied.

"Ho, what a blessing! Valborg, I'm to have work!" he shouts to his wife, who is sitting right there beside him. "I always said that if only I could get to talk with you——"

"You ought to have known how I'd be!"

"Ay, that's what I've always said, that's what I've always said!"

August, the captain, the general: "You're to begin Monday!" And merely to show how mighty he is, he scribbles a note on a page of his memorandum book to the effect that this man, Jørn Mathildesen, is to have work first putting in the foundation and later erecting the walls! With that he signs his name with a flourish, tears out the page and says: "Deliver this order to my foreman whose name is Boldemand!"

Jørn is acquainted with Boldemand and he nods and offers profuse thanks: Oh, it was so fine of him! Just as he had always said——

"So! Now you must go!" August commands him. "You can't get to the pasturage along this side of the lake, for

down yonder is the falls. You'll have to go around. But be sure and take it easy!" he says.

Valborg begins walking. She must walk some distance before passing through those thousand sheep. At length she utters her call. The creatures raise their heads and listen. She calls again and at once there is a rippling motion throughout the flock, the animals begin moving off in the direction of the sound, some answer her with a bleat, and finally they are off in a flowing stream, Jørn bringing up to the rear.

It is all just as it was yesterday morning; in a brief time there is not a single sheep left there at August's side.

He continues to sit resting there a while longer. He is in no particular hurry. He hears Valborg's calls fading farther and farther into the distance, and he realizes that she is making off with the flock in perfect order.

At length he rises and strolls off toward home. It is now half-past-four.

Hm, not a bad idea, after all, had he taken that mid-day nap, he thinks to himself, but anyway, he will sit down for a bit of a rest upon reaching the lodge.

Suddenly he hears two shots, one directly following the other. He halts. They had come from some place up near the lake. Likely enough, though, Jørn and Valborg will be able to control the animals—they had departed in such perfect order.

He resumes walking and arrives at length at the lodge. Whilst sitting there for a few moments' rest on a stone, he hears two further reports. Damnably annoying of that Englishman to go shooting fair in the path of the sheep! And bad though it was that he should fire his gun, even worse it would be should the sheep catch sight of the dog which they would surely mistake for a fox or a wolf. He could hardly believe, however, that Jørn and Valborg would allow themselves to be overpowered. It would take a good deal for that to happen . . .

And so he starts on down the road, his own magnificent motor road. But he has a queer feeling within him and, for the first time in long months, he catches himself making the sign of the cross. How singular! A half-forgotten gesture his hand performs all of its own accord.

. . . Then, all at once, he hears the sounds of a terrific commotion behind him . . . He wheels about and his eyes behold sheep—sheep, the whole way up along the road, a mighty maelstrom of sheep, a mad torrent raging down toward him and which will perhaps pour over him. God in Heaven! For a moment, he attempts to breast the tide, to head the creatures off with his staff. Utterly futile—he is borne along with the tide and he has all he can do simply to remain upright. A thousand sheep propel him on a swift journey down the road. They arrive at the unfenced steep and there the Consul, on the way up in his car, stands barring their course. The latter sounds his horn to halt the creatures, but this succeeds merely in terrifying them further. A sheer mountain wall along one side of the road, the open abyss along the other. The Consul backs his car, but, as there is a curve behind him, he must move slowly. Even so, it is possible that some of the flock might have safely passed by the car, had a figure not stood there blocking the way. It is Aase—Aase who stands there blocking the way, waving her arms and swishing that Lappish skirt of hers. The Consul shouts at her and she shrieks something in reply, perhaps something to the effect that she is merely trying to assist in halting the stampede. But what she does is quite the opposite—she simply drives the animals off the road and some are already tumbling down into the abyss—nine hundred feet down to their doom . . .

The torrent increases and a human being is there in the midst of that boiling maelstrom. August. He is seen to smile momentarily in the direction of the machine. Perhaps that is because he imagines to save himself at the

last moment, or perhaps only because he does not wish to arouse any one's concern for himself. Therefore he smiles. But he can not save himself. Sheep are sheep. Where one goes the others follow. The flock presses on, an avalanche of sheep descending into the deep. When August sees that all is lost, he grasps a sheep by its shaggy fleece. Perhaps he will have it to fall upon. He holds it up in front of him, but it wriggles free. Then he is carried over . . .

"Sailor's Grave a Sea of Sheep" is the headline in the paper about August.

THE END.

